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Investigating Affective Dimensions of Whiteness in the Cultural Studies Writing Classroom: Toward a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy

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Investigating Affective Dimensions of Whiteness in the Cultural Studies Writing
Classroom: Toward a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
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Sandoval

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the teachers who have encouraged me to do better and to be better. I will give to others what you have given to me. It is also dedicated to my network of support—my friends and family—most especially my mother, Sharon Kenyon, whose love continues to inspire me and my work.

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Investigating Affective Dimensions of Whiteness in the Cultural Studies Writing Classroom: Toward a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy

Allison Brimmer

ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to help teachers understand the ways that affect is tied to the dominant ideology of white supremacy in contemporary U.S. society. It argues that affect—the complex confluence of feeling and judgment—is bound intricately to racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc. In this work I attempt to deconstruct the social construction of affect that fuels dominant white ideology—what some scholars call whiteness—in the context of white teachers and students in the cultural studies writing classroom. With the lofty yet ultimately empowering goal of effecting anti-racist change in the classroom and in the profession, I trace affective dimensions of whiteness (such as fear, blame, defensiveness, and denial) revealed by white teachers and students. Clinging to the myths of meritocracy, individualism, and the American Dream, white teachers and students often unknowingly perpetuate dominance based on white privilege. In this work I offer a pedagogical theory informed by the work of a variety of feminist scholars who consider the complex and ultimately powerful concepts of love and care. By problematizing their work and my own, I argue for a thoroughly self-reflexive, critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that works to foster vital critical awareness in our students (and in ourselves).

Chapter One: Cultural Studies, Feminist Theories, Whiteness, and the Social Construction of Affect

This dissertation seeks to help teachers understand the ways that affect is tied to the dominant ideology of white supremacy in contemporary United States society.¹ Affective dispositions—the complex confluence of feeling and judgment—are bound intricately to our ideas about race, as well as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc. Recognizing affective dimensions of white supremacy—what some scholars call whiteness—such as fear, isolation, defensiveness, and denial and the ways that these dimensions are revealed by white students and teachers is crucial to fostering democratizing change in the writing classroom and in the academic profession in general.² My work argues for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that helps to disclose the affective dimensions of whiteness and makes them the subject of study in the texts of popular culture and in the people who “consume” those texts. For I do not believe that it is enough for a critical pedagogy to lead to a recognition of white supremacist structures of affect as they operate in the texts of popular culture. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy must go further by insisting on critical self-examinations if such a pedagogy is to have any impact on dismantling racism. Ultimately, by critically examining affective dimensions of whiteness in our classrooms and in our profession and by outlining a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, I have hope for this dissertation’s ability to offer important insights that lead to eradicating race privilege, and its co-conspirator, racism, in the classroom and in the profession, in general.

An important concern about any pedagogy is the extent to which it may actually reinscribe discrimination. This concern is especially valid for critical writing pedagogies. Certainly it is a legitimate concern about a cultural studies writing pedagogy that aims to challenge dominant cultural narratives and foster democratizing social change. Obviously I cannot offer indisputable empirical evidence that such a pedagogy alters beliefs about racism in long-lasting, significant ways. Lacking a valid measure, however, does not warrant abandoning a critical pedagogy. I do believe a specific concentration on ways in which ideological beliefs are invested with affective dispositions toward race offers an advance over critical writing pedagogies that ignore the power of the affective realm in constructing world views. Although my focus is on whiteness, this work likely offer insights into affective understandings of other identity markers as well, such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on. The designations “affective dispositions” or “affective understandings” hold central significance to my work. Along with other scholars and teachers who are well aware that emotion is tied to ideology, I am keenly interested in better understanding affect as an integral aspect of beliefs about race and race privilege.

Affective dispositions toward race and other categories of identity are so enmeshed in dominant ideology that they often seem invisible. Indeed, even “rational”—and I do mean for this term to be understood as problematic—aspects of beliefs are so taken for granted that they can be difficult to recognize, articulate, and examine critically. Work in cultural studies has, unquestionably,

made important strides in foregrounding and critiquing ideological constructions that protect positions of privilege for many. But I argue that far more work is needed to better understand affective dispositions that sustain dominant ideology, specifically the ideology of white supremacy.

An approach I take in this work is to redirect questions about ideology and the marginalization of non-white Others. I engage in an inquiry into the affective dispositions that lead to the solidification of white peoples' world views—world views that allow them to reject the reality that racial privilege shapes the opportunities for and lives of white people. As such, I turn the tables on questions about how dominant ideology marginalizes those with *marked* racial identities, i.e., the identities of those *Others* who are marginalized by dominant, white, male, heterosexual, financially privileged, “able” bodied, and Christian mainstream culture. Although inquiries that examine the effects of dominant ideology on Others are crucial and recognized in this work, I contend that such investigations often position those who are “Othered” as *objects* of inquiry without due consideration to what dominant ideology does to those who are ostensibly safeguarded by it. In other words, it remains taken for granted that those who have the privilege of unmarked identities enjoy *subject* positions of greater social power and dominance over disenfranchised *Others*. I believe that efforts toward dismantling power structures that disadvantage or oppress *Others* on the basis of race must entail critical examinations of dominant culture itself and the ideologically fueled affective dispositions embedded in it. This means that such efforts must involve questioning the complex relationship(s) between dominant

ideology and the affective dispositions of those it apparently serves best. In short, to better understand racism, it is imperative to better understand whiteness, most notably affective dispositions of whiteness. Thus, my work draws from scholarship in the area of critical white studies that turns the critical gaze away from *Others* without white skin privilege and toward those who continue to benefit from and perpetrate racism, whether overtly or inadvertently. As a kindred area of scholarship with cultural studies, critical white studies can, I argue, help scholars and teachers of writing who work in cultural studies discern ways to dismantle the oppressive structures of racist, white supremacist ideology.

At the Crossroads: Cultural Studies and the Field of Rhetoric and Composition

Because I situate my work as a cultural studies project within the field of rhetoric and composition, it is important to make explicit (1) why I regard cultural studies projects to be consonant with my own and (2) to identify ways in which I believe such projects have not been as effective as they could be in combating racism.

Scholarly work and classroom practices that have brought cultural studies to the field of rhetoric and composition have demonstrated an unflinching commitment to understanding representations of race, class, gender, and other identity markers as ideological constructions that are produced, distributed, and consumed in everyday discursive formations and practices. In the brief time span

of just a little over a decade, intellectual projects and pedagogical developments in cultural studies within the field of rhetoric and composition have burgeoned to such an extent that cultural studies has become one of the major areas of study in the discipline. Recent research such as rhetorician Thomas Rosteck's edited collection *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies* is proof of the extent to which the two fields have entered into an academic relationship. Other evidence of the two fields' close ties comes from some rhetoric and composition graduate programs in which graduate students are able to declare cultural studies as an area of concentration. In fact, some rhetoric and composition programs have solidified the centrality of cultural studies to the field's disciplinary identity to such a degree that the programs have been renamed. Although it would not be accurate to claim that cultural studies projects have a "natural fit" within rhetoric and composition—witness the continued debates in the field over, for example, the place of politics in our classroom practices—the foremost agenda of cultural studies is one that resonates with a large contingent of scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition. That is, the commitment to interrogating ways in which dominant ideology shapes everyday life is wedded to an explicitly political agenda, namely, the promotion of the ideals of critical democracy.

Although cultural studies is still a relatively nascent area of study within the field of rhetoric and composition, scholars and teachers who have advanced cultural studies projects have done so, generally speaking, in fairly uniform ways. Since dominant ideology is maintained by an unequal distribution of power so

thoroughly ensconced in everyday life that the values and beliefs that both constitute and perpetuate it are largely taken for granted or not even noticed, an important goal of virtually any cultural studies project is to elicit greater awareness of ways in which relations of power are represented in the “everyday.” With an eye toward revealing the ever-present codes that reify particular power relations—most notably those that support the continued privilege of white, heterosexual, class-privileged, and able-bodied men—cultural studies inquiries provide opportunities for teachers and students to discover these codes at work.

However, I believe these inquiries are severely limited when they do not consider the realm of affect in relation to the construction, dissemination, and consumption of cultural codes.³ Most projects have focused on the detrimental effects of discriminatory representations of Others on the *Othered* (e.g., the phenomenon of internalized oppression). Further, those projects that do attempt to translate the effects of these representations onto those with race privilege have not considered consistently or fully the effects of these representations in terms of affect and the world views (and identity formations) of the racially privileged, i.e., white people.

Often, cultural studies projects take an explicitly textual approach, “reading” the codes embedded in everyday cultural texts as distinct and straightforward evidence of the racist (and sexist, classist, heterosexist, etc.) ideas made manifest by dominant ideology.⁴ Because the consumption and subsequent reproduction of dominant codes is more subtle and complex, some might reject the “simplicity” or “top down” approach of such studies.

Nevertheless, learning to read and re-read these codes is an important *part* of critical writing pedagogies. One way to complicate the study of culture is to think about *why* people are drawn to specific texts and why they actively reject others: What purposes do various texts serve? What satisfactions do they provide? What messages about affect are being sent by these texts? Thinking about the strong, yet socially silenced, dimension of affect that accompanies cultural texts can provide insights into how these texts reveal and reify particular ideological affective dispositions that support whiteness. With an approach that considers affect, scholars can identify and thus actively work against textual effects that play a vital role in the construction of white supremacist world views.

I define a cultural studies writing classroom as one that compels its learners to engage directly with the worlds around them, past the walls of their classrooms and the confines of their computer screens. From its start at the Birmingham Centre and into the United States, cultural studies and its projects have taken a variety of forms, but their focus remains the same: to investigate the “everyday” that shapes our “everyday.” Coming to new knowledge about the self and the everyday in terms of affective dimensions, in addition to intellectual understandings, is empowering, to be sure. I relate a critical, feminist, anti-racist, cultural studies writing pedagogy to the “method” that self-identified “United States third-world” feminist theorist Chéla Sandoval has named “meta-ideologizing.” Meta-ideologizing starts with Roland Barthes’ notion of social critique that identifies the dominant ideologies transmitted through cultural texts. This dissertation and the pedagogy I advocate reads and critiques social

structures and our participation in them. But the theoretical concept of meta-ideologizing goes further than “reading” and “critiquing” dominant ideologies. Meta-ideologizing requires its practitioners to envision and *enact* new, more informed and democratizing ideologies.

For example, when country-pop singer Shania Twain belts out the lyrics to “Man! I Feel Like a Woman,” she claims that it is the woman’s “prerogative” to wear “man shirts and short skirts,” to “be free” to “color my hair” and “do what I dare.” Millions of listeners tune in, and, lacking the more critical perspective and power that “meta-ideologizing” and similar cultural studies projects offer, they overlook Twain’s white privileged status and see her only as a beautiful, empowered woman who makes money singing about women shedding social constraints, letting loose, forgoing “romance” in favor of “dance,” and being who they want to be. A more critical perspective would give them the opportunity to “interrupt their [everyday] understandings”⁵ long enough to register the fact that Twain is a worker herself who earns money for record companies and record company CEOs. Most people intuit the message (and shell out the dollars to buy it) that “Freedom” can be packaged up and sold to women in the form of hair color and short skirts. They see pictures of Twain’s scantily-clad, designer-diet body on her newest CD and do not look past the stereotypical white-woman beauty to see the fact that it is a carefully constructed, controlled, dyed, and airbrushed one, less about empowerment and more about profit.

Employing cultural studies in the writing classroom leads our students to examine the ideologies that cultural texts such as Twain, her record, and its

industry inculcate. For example, students might start with a study of Twain and come to examine the issue of racial representation in the country music industry, in general, no doubt an industry that has been and continues to be predominantly white. Beyond examining cultural texts, cultural studies and critical theories such as Sandoval's notion of meta-ideologizing make room for new, more progressive and empowering understandings and *democratizing* ideologies. Thus, with new knowledge comes the power not only to analyze our culture, but also to form richer interpretive frameworks that accommodate non-dominant ideologies. In the cultural studies writing classroom that I advocate, learning to think in ways that critique the dominant ideology means learning to engage in rigorous critique of the familiar. There is powerful promise in a "suspicion of familiarity."⁶ Cultural studies involves deconstructing what seems a given and understanding that that deconstruction is a necessary part of coming to a richer understanding of seemingly benign cultural forms. With its emphasis on reading and re-reading culture, Sandoval's meta-ideologizing is an important "methodology" used to disrupt the familiar in the process of reaching for democratizing social change, what Sandoval calls a "revolutionary *movidas*." Critical pedagogues committed to learning and teaching tactics of critical cultural interrogation benefit from the perspectives of feminist thinkers such as Sandoval as they foster an examination and re-examination of the everyday. This dissertation engages in a critique of the everyday culture of white supremacy, specifically, and it argues that the cultural studies writing classroom is an optimum location for discussing, thinking, writing,

and learning about contemporary culture and its ties to race, power, and white skin color privilege in United States society.

Defining Affect and Affective Dimensions of Dominant Ideology

Studying affective dimensions of contemporary culture is especially relevant for a critical, feminist, anti-racist writing pedagogy. Important figures in cultural studies have noted the potential in considering affective dimensions of cultural formations. For example, Lawrence Grossberg has considered at some length the ways that “discursive fields are organized affectively as well as ideologically” (“History” 191):

if we want to understand particular cultural practices, we need to ask how they empower their audiences and the audiences empower the practices; that is, how the very materiality of cultural practices functions within an affective economy of everyday life.

(*We Gotta* 192)

This dissertation argues for the necessity of considering the affective dimensions of the “cultural practices” of students and teachers with white skin color privilege. It is interested in the ways that white privilege is supported in everyday culture, in our profession, and in our classrooms, and it argues for learning more about how the languages of white supremacy are spoken to and by white people in contemporary United States society. What “matters” to us is determined in large part by what Grossberg calls “affective magnets,” the cultural forces that pull and

push people toward particular positions, positions shaped by a white supremacist culture. Grossberg contends that affective investments work to call ideological positions into place (Grossberg, *We Gotta* 282-3).

As a multitude of scholars have pointed out, society at large and academics in particular do not often acknowledge the emotional sphere.⁷ Instead, emotion is rejected by the privileged and powerful patriarchal order, feminized, usually defined as weakness, and relegated to the domestic realm. The scientific, rationalist academic tradition values the mind over the body, the rational over the emotive, and the ability to think over the ability to feel. Steeped in Cartesian binaries, even scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition who might not be identified as quite so “traditional” are making strong arguments in favor of this split. A prime and chilling example comes from a recently-published article in *Teaching English in the Two Year College*. Becky Flores is one of a growing number of scholars who are investigating and promoting critical thinking pedagogies, yet the moves she makes in her work are indicative of the reason/emotion split that continues to limit learning. In “Deracination and the D.I.S. in the First-Year Writing Course,” Flores uses the word “deracination” in her title and throughout to refer to “cognitive uprooting,” which fits neatly into a critical thinking pedagogy that she terms *decritique* (261). Choosing to refer to deracination as only a mental process that takes place in a college writing classroom seems insensitive to the concept and lived history of deracination, which is an uprooting of a group of people, often (usually) against their will. Nevertheless, in her *decritique* pedagogy, Flores requires her students to sign a

contract in which they commit to work in what she calls a “Detached Intellectual Space.” In this mythical (indeed impossible) space, students are, to use Flores’ words, “desensitized” and “anaesthetized” to the pain that accompanies receiving peers’ critiques of their writing (262). Thanks to the D.I.S., Flores argues, students are free to read and write critical responses to each other’s writing without “allowing personal feeling to *color* the words” they choose (262).⁸ Flores posits that a sense of agency accompanies the active suppression of affective response.

Even Flores herself, however, cannot maintain the reason/emotion split she is advocating. When she writes about her students engaging in “deracination” work, she employs the realm of affect she is trying simultaneously to sublimate. Ironically, thanks to all the hard work they do in the D.I.S., her students “care” about their work and engage in it with an avid “passion”; Flores describes them as “skeptical, delighted, [and] sincere” (267, 269). While Flores notes that passion is perhaps *necessary* for critical thinking, her article is filled with *enthusiastic* arguments for the need to remain emotionally detached (267). Her logic is the norm, not the exception, but it just does not make sense and is indicative of the slippery slope of trying to detach intellect from affect.

Evidence of this fantasy of detachment comes in a more veiled yet recognizable form in a recent piece by Peter Elbow. Elbow is well known for his work on advocating the search for and expression of the writer’s “inner voice” that is often not readily intelligible or “accessible” through straightforward

“brainstorming.” Prominent texts such as *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*, and *Writing Without Teachers* reflect Elbow’s faith in “intuition” and the realm beyond the rational. Elbow is on target when he states, “We get in trouble if we write off emotions or fail to take them seriously or do not allow them a central role in our thinking about writing and teaching” (Elbow vii). He envisions a theory, what he calls the “methodological believing game,” as a *supplement* to critical thinking. The “believing game” forces learners to place themselves in the metaphorical shoes of others. In the forward to *A Way to Move*, a recent anthology centered on emotion in composition studies, Elbow contends that belief is a *supplement* to thought, an “added bonus” that helps people to learn and know more. The believing game “invites *thinking with feelings*.” However, only a few lines later Elbow suggests that the believing game “invites the *harnessing* of feelings for the sake of *better* thinking” (viii emphasis added). Again, this fantasy of detachment is highly problematic, especially when it suggests that “harnessing” and/or sublimating feelings helps us to think “better” or more clearly (viii). While I do not think—in fact it might be absurd to suggest it—that Elbow’s aim is to reject the realm of feeling, his phrasing is another example of the predominant, seemingly irrepressible attitude that it is possible to separate feeling from thought.

Perhaps the slippage of Elbow’s language into the feeling/thinking dichotomy is evidence of a complex dialectical relationship between thinking and feeling. It is ironic, as well, that as Flores works to extinguish affect she is, in reality, acknowledging it—perhaps even giving it strength and support. Whether

intentional or unintentional, the consistent attempts at separating the realm of feeling or emotion from judgment supports a *fractured* understanding of ourselves and the world, a split that hinders, as cultural critic and critical pedagogue bell hooks would argue, our abilities to learn and relate to each other in more “holistic” ways (*Teaching* 14). As such, in this work affect is defined as comprised of feeling, thinking, *and* judgment. Understanding affect as something more than feeling means understanding that thinking is only one component of the judgments at which we arrive; feeling is *intertwined* with thinking. It leads people to judgment, to the formation of perspectives and world views. Affect is the result of our enormously complex feeling, thinking, and judging selves, constructed specifically in this cultural moment.

In “Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion,” feminist rhetorician Lynn Worsham contends that emotion is not independent of the political contexts in which it is situated but is, instead, in many ways, constructed *by* them. For Worsham, emotion is

the tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meanings. (216)

Affect, then, is not about some raw “feeling” or individual intuition. Instead, it is linked to distinct and complex historical and political influences. My project makes no attempt to tease apart feeling, thinking, and judgment as Flores and

others might have it, because as I have stated I believe this separation is impossible. Instead, it works to get a better picture of how these elements work in conjunction to inculcate specific world views that support “the social order” in this political time and place. More specifically, it asks how affect—feeling, thinking, and judgment—works to construct and reinforce world views inflected with “whiteness,” a significant component of United States (and in most cases global) racist culture. Whiteness enables and simultaneously feeds off racial and ethnic inequality, and it is composed of a multitude of affective responses that are both sources and products of racism in this United States cultural climate that rewards some while punishing many Others based on racial and ethnic categorizations. This project works at gaining insight into the affective dimensions of whiteness in United States culture with the goal of helping white educators to understand better how to unlearn their own “whiteness” and teach against attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that support white supremacy.

Feminist Insights into Affect and the Study of Culture

Although the affective realm is devalued and often ignored in favor of “reason” in United States culture at large, feminist thought rejects this persistent and patriarchal reason/emotion split. Perhaps one of the most important contributions made by feminist scholarship is an understanding of the political

significance of the everyday, personal life. Our bodies, our thoughts, our feelings, our behaviors, and our affective dispositions are political texts that reflect the hegemonic social structures that condone and profit from racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, etc. As I discuss at length in chapters four and five, feminist scholarship has been an important source for researchers in rhetoric and composition, specifically. Elizabeth Flynn’s oft-cited “Composing as a Woman” draws on feminist psychology to discuss differences between men and women’s writing styles. A work that was landmark in its introduction of feminism to the field of rhetoric and composition, the article makes arguments for using pedagogical strategies that address the learning styles of not just men, who traditionally have been favored in the educational system, but also women. Some eighteen years later, Flynn’s work is required reading for composition theory classes across the country. However, with hindsight we can read Flynn’s work as somewhat essentialist—pigeon-holing women into the category of communal or relational writers and men into the category of competitive, hierarchy-bound writers. Nonetheless, “Composing as a Woman” is an important piece that introduces the consideration of gender to composition studies. More recent work such as Worsham’s and Eileen Schell’s has commented on the essentialist views of many feminist scholars in composition studies and has advanced our thought about the intricacies of gender, social construction, and pedagogy.

We are, in many ways, the products of the social structures that surround us.⁹ Because our “affective selves,”—our thinking/feeling/judging selves—are constructed in this political world, we can work to understand ways that affective

states are infused by power relations and dominant cultural ideologies. Feminist educational theorist Megan Boler and Worsham have been especially crucial in helping us to see ways that dominant power structures and our participation in them (whether in the profession or in society at large) are central to what seems so very individual—our feelings. These scholars have shown us that when we are thinking about the immense reality of social construction, overlooking or underestimating the political construction of affective dispositions, as I have argued, leads to more limited understandings of the social construction of self and an obfuscation of stereotypically passive, nurturing roles that women are expected to perform.

Social forces—what Marx referred to as superstructure and what Althusser might term Ideological State Apparatuses such as family, education, religion, the military, and the government—tell us how to feel and when to feel it. For example, at home, cultural sources teach us that we must be loving and respectful—if we are women, that is. Men, on the other hand, learn they must NOT express their feelings. Indeed, like the child’s hero Superman who is strong enough to bend steel with his bare hands, young boys are told to “man up,” not cry, and learn to be tough if they want to “make it in this world.” They are taught early on that they can and will engage in the hostile behaviors of our violent world. At play—their happiest, seemingly most benign moments—white, male “action figure” G.I. Joe, whose muscle size has literally tripled over the last few decades, normalizes the military and serves as the symbol of the unfeeling, rough, tough, physically charged, and aggressive life that boys are compelled to

lead. While girls are not usually the target markets for “action figure” dolls, Barbie® has produced dolls that allow girls to play at various occupations. In the year 2000, for the first time girls had the option of playing with a (white) Barbie® that runs for president. In line with stereotypical, nurturing gender roles laid out for women—in this case young girls—the presidential candidate Barbie’s® top campaign promises include working for animal kindness and better education (Zumhagen).

Founded in 1959 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, Barbie® floods the consumer market with white, ultra-thin, unrealistically large-breasted female dolls. It took two decades for Barbie® to create dolls that represented any racial category besides Caucasian; In 1980 Barbie® released Black and Hispanic Barbie Dolls, along with dolls representing women from Western European countries. The following year, Barbie® released an “Oriental” Barbie and in 1993 a Native American one (Zumhagen). The ever popular white-skinned Barbie® and G.I. Joe inculcate stereotypical gender roles. Girls play with girl dolls that, even when they represent women as running for the United States presidency, still confine them to valuing nurturing and community above all else. Boys play with G.I. Joe “action figures” and are reminded of the stereotypically active, unfeeling, and even violent gendered roles they are expected to perform. Moreover, these dolls perpetuate white normativity, teaching young white children that they can expect to see their skin color represented predominantly in the toys available for sale. Barbie® has failed to create many non-white dolls,

and when the company does produce non-white dolls, the toys tend to have distinctively Caucasian features (Zumhagen).

In the context of schooling environments, it feels good for girls and boys (women and men) to get gold stars, A's, and our teachers' attention. Feminist educational theorist Megan Boler posits that the United States educational system teaches kids when and how to "make nice." In school, as in culture at large, affect is "mediated by ideologies and capitalist values" (Boler 5). Other research into classroom environments supports Boler's claims. For example, compositionist Wendy Ryden has considered this culture of "politeness" that reigns in our learning environments. A concept that plays an important role in this work, the culture of "politeness" is one that maintains a sexist and racist status quo. Girls are expected to keep relatively quiet and "make nice"; boys are expected to "play hard and tough" (not only in the classroom, but in society as well). Today's patriarchal educational culture maintains its reliance on "reason" and keeps boys and girls (women and men) "in line" and out of what most of us perceive as dangerous territory, territory where our "whole," affective selves are acknowledged and considered, territory where we might feel too much, or at least too much out of line with the dominant, straight, white, male social order. Feminist critics have helped us to see the importance of thinking not just about men when we engage in critique, but also about women. They have led us to consider more fully the roles that are constructed for us, especially in terms of affect. Moreover, they have led us to examine not just socially proscribed gendered dynamics of everyday life, but also class dynamics, issues of able-

bodiedness, size, age, and, as I discuss in more depth in the following section, race and racial identity.

Critical White Studies: Learning to Deconstruct White Privilege

hooks' concept of "eating the Other" is a critique of the dominant, white cultural norm that encourages objectifying and sexualizing people of color, offering them up for "consumption" to those with white privilege. hooks considers, among other things, the ways that white people engage in commodification of the non-white Other through cultural/sexual tourism. In "Eating the Other," hooks gives the example of a contemporary fashion catalogue marketed to upper-middle class people (the majority of whom are white) to illustrate her point; the catalogue ensures white people have the experience of flipping through its pages and seeing images of other white people featured as the adventure-seeking consumers of exoticized, non-white cultures. (White) shoppers have the opportunity to feel a sense of validation, pleasure, and power over the non-white other when they see only white catalogue "characters" decorated with artifacts from cultures from around the world. We can see a prime example of hooks' theory in Figure 1. The advertisement features a woman of color in a stereotypical, animalist portrayal. Indeed, she is trapped behind cage-like metal fencing. The woman rests passively, legs spread, ensconced in leather (animal

skin) and lying against animal fur. The look in her eyes is a sexual one; she gazes (back) at the viewer of the ad with an expression of sexual hunger. Viewers are therefore encouraged to see the woman of color as a willing, passionate, animalistic sexual partner; they are offered the fantasy of “consuming” the non-white Other through purchase of the “product” for sale.



Figure 1

I see today's writing classrooms as situated in and shaped by a concrete and complex historical moment when advertisements like the one above are considered normal and appropriate. They are considered "celebrations" of women of color, evidence of the "progress" white society has made in "tolerating" images of people of color. Indeed, this is a moment when, in the United States, women of color earn just a little over two thirds of what white women earn (Bureau). The number of reported hate crimes in Toronto has doubled since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States ("News"). White supremacists are sending racist literature to young, white high school students in Oregon in an attempt to recruit them into the white supremacist movement ("News"). The Aryan youth movement is growing at an exponential rate and the Ku Klux Klan is likewise continuing to boast its strength ("State"). Well-known Louisiana politician and renowned white supremacist David Duke pedals t-shirts boasting white pride symbols on his web site. Similar to cult followers of Rush Limbaugh—no doubt there is overlap between demographics—Duke's white supremacist devotees are tuning in *en masse* to his internet radio show and buying up his t-shirts, along with copies of his newest book *Jewish Supremacism*. The ever popular Duke is just one symbol of frighteningly ever-marketed American "white pride." Another example of this marketing comes from a racist clothing line that Target Stores recently pulled from its shelves. The clothing and hats featured the number 88, which serves as code for the phrase Heil Hitler among Nazi supporters ("State").

This is a moment in time when hate crimes continue to occur in our cities, our towns, our suburbs, and our universities. In February 2002, at the start of black history month at the large urban university campus where I teach in central Florida, students vandalized the bust of Martin Luther King Jr. which rests across from the hub of campus—the student center. The vandalized statue, now repaired, sits in violent juxtaposition to its peaceful surroundings: a serene fountain and a long white trellis draped with ropes of bright pink flowers. At the start of black history month in the following year, 2003, an “anonymous” student hung a makeshift noose in a tree outside a campus housing facility.

When my white students write to me in their journals about the recent hate crimes on their beautifully landscaped campus, some of them tell me that they feel oh so *tired* of talking about race in our class. They are *tired* of “other people” “pulling the race card” and overreacting about what “might not even be a noose in the tree at all.”

“Maybe it’s just a piece of rope. Did anyone think of that?” they exclaim, and the anger is palpable on the page. They write that they are *tired* of being blamed for being born with white privilege, and they are *tired* of being made to sit in classrooms and feel *guilty* about it.

This is a moment in time when I hear new, young, white writing teachers telling me about their classes, about how excited they are to be teaching, but that they have quite a few trepidations because “there are so many black students” in their first-year writing classes.

“You know how ‘they’ write,” one woman said to me in conspiratorial tones as we made small talk (which was obviously not “small” at all) in my cramped, windowless office.

This is a moment in time when United States citizens maintain the social structure that bestows privileges and denies rights based on arbitrary assignments of meaning and value, most saliently in terms of categories of race, sex/gender, class, sexuality, able-bodiedness, etc. An examination of white students and teachers that analyzes racism and the various languages of whiteness we “speak” in our everyday lives can lead to white teachers making positive, anti-racist movement(s) in and beyond the classroom. Of course, not just white people enact prejudice; I hope this work can be valuable for anyone trying to gain critical awareness about racism and its complex manifestations. This dissertation argues for the necessity of a movement away from white supremacist orientations and toward anti-racist everyday living. It looks for signs of the invisible systems that work quietly to adorn not just teachers but students, as well, with unearned advantages. Moreover, it works to uncover everyday performances of white normativity that fuel our white supremacist system which benefits many at the expense and detriment of many Others.

As I have tried to establish, cultural studies projects can play a vital role in illuminating hidden aspects of the workings of power and privilege that inform race, class, gender, and other identity categories. I have chosen to focus specifically on race and whiteness, in part, because I want more insight about my

own racial privilege. Today, the overwhelming majority of teachers, like myself, are white. In order to be an agent working against white privilege and for anti-racist social change, it is necessary to understand ways that white skin privilege is and has been created and reinforced by larger society. A more developed sense of the intricacies of white privilege can come from an examination of the socio-cultural forces that construct people at this specific moment in time. It is my hope that engaging in this type of inquiry can serve as a model for others who are also, or who have the potential to be, committed to creating positive changes from their own privileged positions in the white supremacist social order.¹⁰

Engaging in a sustained examination of white privilege runs the risk of further privileging my own privilege, placing it on a pedestal for display. However, it is only by acknowledging and working to understand this privilege that I can come to identify and work against the discriminatory practices that sustain it. In truth, unless whites are actively engaged in “outing” and eradicating the system of skin color privilege, they are supporting it. One of the primary places where whites acquire our racism is one of our most intimate places—in our homes and with our families. We learn a variety of sometimes conflicting and always complex ideas about race from the people we love and trust. Many whites learn that racism is a “problem” that happens “out there” in the world, but not in the comfortable cocoon of their homes. White children learn they do not have to worry about racism because it is not their issue, even in homes such as my own where racism was discouraged. And even if we realize that there is such a thing as racism, most white people do not grasp the concept of white skin color

privilege that continues to fuel racism today.¹¹ And so, even in white homes where the reality of racism is recognized, the problem remains “out there,” not part of the white person’s experience; it is not the white person’s “problem”; it is a problem for those “Other” people, those “Others” whose lot it is to bear the sad burden of racism.¹²

In addition to learning to distance ourselves from racism’s reality, white people learn a host of hate-filled stereotypes attached to racial minorities outside and inside our homes, and often we learn racism directly from the people we depend(ed) on for our most basic human needs—the same people who fed us and gave us shelter, tucked us in at night, and gave us kisses in the morning.¹³ The horrific but obscured reality is that for most whites such security and comfort is accompanied by violent racism. One of my own formative experiences with racism serves as an example of the ways that racism is reinforced in the primary cultural setting of home.¹⁴

As a young, affluent white girl who grew up in a suburb in the Midwest, the “heartland” of the United States of America, I learned that “heart” was indeed an important thing to have, and I was schooled to use that “heart” in very specific ways. The term “heart” is invoked regularly in Midwestern discourse; we pride ourselves on living in the “heart of the country,” where people on the street almost *always* make eye contact, smile, and say hello. Strangers say “thank you” and “please”; employees at the McDonald’s drive-thru and at the DOT ask how your day is going. Although my hometown is certainly not the focus of this

dissertation, its friendly, “pristine,” and “clean” environment is predominantly white and reflective of the everyday culture of “niceness” and whiteness; it is a telling source of the white privilege that is suspiciously out of sight on white people’s radar screens.¹⁵

At home, I learned the “loving power” of whiteness; in other words, I experienced the complexity of living in a family that loved fiercely and hated even more so. I learned of the ways that affection and love could run right up against the ugliness of bigotry, and I learned of the solidarity that accompanies whiteness. To love and respect my elders was akin to family law, and to love and respect them well meant, and still does mean, to know when to shut my mouth, nod, smile, and pretend to agree. It was, and still is, to know when to say thank you, when to say please (and in what tone of voice). What is most illuminating for me, though, is learning about how showing love and gaining acceptance sometimes means knowing when to collude in the racist behaviors of whiteness.

Still today I remember vividly gliding on the periphery of adult conversations as a pre-adolescent girl, listening to the grown ups in my family (who seemed to have so much power) chat about the world. I think it was this power that as a child (and perhaps still, as an adult) I was forever trying to understand and attain. Every year, my family would converge for a reunion or a holiday. My aunts left ex governors’ mansions and hill-top homes in the Caribbean to fly “home to the heartland.” Once there, everyone drank and talked and laughed. I remember how the adults used so many words and phrases that I

did not understand, and how they made jokes that did not seem like jokes at all. On one bitterly cold Christmas Day, I remember being inside the warmth of our sunken living room, sitting poised on the arm of the couch, and trying to figure out what was so funny as much of my family laughed at a joke that had gone over my head. When the laughter diminished, I asked my grandfather to clue me in: “Grandpa, do black people really have an extra muscle in their leg that makes them better basketball players?” I asked innocently. The room went silent.

It was a moment for me to learn while I was trying to fit in, and I remember it well; Grandpa was somewhat sheepish in his reply that “No, black people don’t have extra muscles in their legs,” and one of my uncles, the one who made the joke, piped up with more “light-hearted” racist joking to keep the conversation going.

For some reason, this scenario is one that remains clear in my mind, perhaps because it was a moment when I felt extremely left out, and I was learning that the path to inclusion and validation was strewn with racist untruths. Similar to gossip, the jokes were a dirty pleasure that some of the members of my family reveled in. Laughter eased the tensions of a group that, like many families, was often on edge. What better way to find a temporary solidarity than in ostracizing the Other and reifying our own racial privilege?

Not everyone laughed as long or as loud that time or at other times. In fact, my mother and father for sure spoke out strongly against the hate revealed in our family later on that day, but only after the rest of the family had left our

house. In that particular space, they did what I have learned to do to “keep the family peace”: remain in quiet collusion, put on a pained smile, roll my eyes, shake my head, and let the whiteness go unchallenged. White supremacy was doing double duty and revealing its complexity that day; it was essentializing the Other and instilling hate at the same time that it was reifying privilege, giving pleasure, and bringing my family members together. Whiteness and security meant laughing and colluding. The power and effectiveness of whiteness that day was the same as it is every day: invisible to some, left unchallenged by others, and tied closely to positive feelings of security and belonging.

One of whiteness’ best friends is silence; what goes unnoticed, unmarked, and undiscussed goes unquestioned. White superiority becomes its own language, often an unspoken one, which has various and powerful methods of maintaining the racist status quo. Scholars in whiteness studies have written extensively about the “invisibility of whiteness.”¹⁶ Despite its invisibility, however, whiteness is the powerful norm in United States society. For example, white privilege starts early when we teach little kids “Which One is Not Like the Others” lessons, and we learn quickly to single out and dwell on difference. Similarly, whiteness is assumed the norm and moves forward as the unmarked race; its superiority complex skillfully self-silenced. The reality of white normativity and supremacy persists as the powerful, unmarked feature, the “One that *is* Like All the Others” feature that does not get discussed and thus maintains power through its invisibility. This dissertation might be read as an inquiry into the ways that structures and grammars of the invisible, un-discussed languages of

whiteness are spoken, often, paradoxically, through the mechanism of not speaking at all.

Projects in whiteness studies, what some call critical white studies, are varied and often interdisciplinary, yet the central goal is the same: to define and investigate the whiteness that is silenced in contemporary culture, all with the aim of understanding ways that race relations across the globe can be improved. Scholars from education, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, anthropology, women's studies, and rhetoric and composition have embraced whiteness studies' tenets. First coined by feminist theorist Marilyn Frye, the term "whiteliness" refers to certain performances of racism, what I call speaking languages of whiteness, and the behaviors that support white supremacy and dominance (150). "Whitely" ways of being are those which reinforce racist ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It is important to recognize that it is not only white people who enact "whiteliness" or "whitely" ways of being; people of color can and do exhibit dominating behaviors. However, given that white people continue to benefit from white normativity in the racist culture of the United States, the term "whitely" makes sense.¹⁷ Furthermore, simply using the word "white" brings white-ness out of its silent hiding place, and repeating the word white thus becomes a useful anti-racist act. It highlights the reality of the unearned advantages that whitely ways of being bestow upon white people specifically.

In a review essay of *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society*, a prominent anthology in whiteness studies, Audrey Thompson, educational theorist and whiteness studies scholar, organizes the study of whiteness into three different types of analysis: 1) psychological analysis; 2) material, structural analysis, and 3) discourse analysis (“Review”). Because Thompson’s work has been so influential to whiteness studies and the field of education, and because my project will draw from Thompson’s, I will summarize my understanding of these three types.

The psychological approach to whiteness studies understands whiteness as an individual’s racist attitude or belief system that is reinforced both by the individual’s insensitivity and the whiteness that remains ever present in contemporary society. From a psychological standpoint whiteness is a phenomenon that can be adjusted through the individual’s coming to consciousness about his or her own racism and subsequent efforts not only to change racist beliefs but also to actively fight *against* racism in larger society, as well.

Psychological approaches to whiteness studies often feature white people writing narratives about their own experiences with white privilege and racism as attempts to discover and relate the sources of their own racist world views. Christine Clark and James O’Donnell’s *Becoming and Unbecoming White: Owning and Disowning a Racial Identity* is a key anthology in the field that presents several such narratives. For example, in “Becoming White: How I Got

Over,” Arnold Cooper reflects on his own life in order to gain new insights into the construction of his (and others’) white racial identity. Cooper contemplates his experiences growing up as a young white boy in an almost all white environment, as an educator in Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement, as a community activist, a school administrator, a church deacon, and finally as a college professor. His story is a testimony to the experiences he went through in his struggle to achieve an anti-racist identity and to engage in anti-racist work. Simultaneously, his work provides examples for others, most importantly, perhaps, for white people learning about and/or engaging in anti-racist work.

Lillian Roybal Rose’s work is representative of whiteness studies scholars studying the psychological impact of racism specifically on white people.¹⁸ Rose’s approach considers white identity in the context of providing psychological counseling to “white allies” who are making the commitment to struggle against racism. She identifies in her clients the persistence of oppressive behaviors and characterizes the conflicts that erupt when white people engage in anti-racist activity.

The psychological study of whiteness also encompasses more theoretical approaches to understanding racial identity formation. Janet Helms’ identification of six, key white “identity statuses” is exemplary of a psychological, theoretical approach. Helms’ identity statuses have a developmental character, one through six described as sequential stages of growth. The first status, “Contact,” is the one in which white people are, for lack of a better term, “oblivious” to their racial

identity. For people with this status, whiteness is “normal.” Second comes “Disintegration,” in which whites come to an increasing awareness of the reality of racism. With the third status, “Reintegration,” white people who have feelings of guilt, anger, fear, and isolation based on their new knowledge of racism deny those feelings and actually project them onto people of color who become the “bad guys,” the perpetrators of their own oppression. “Pseudoindependence,” the fourth status, involves white peoples’ realization that racism is an unjust system and that they have the responsibility of “doing something about it.” Making moves to separate themselves from other whites and seeking relationships with people of color is part of taking that responsibility. The fifth status, “Immersion/Emersion,” involves white people actively investigating their own racist identity and seeking white allies concerned with fighting their own racism as well as the racism enacted by other white people. “Autonomy,” the sixth and final status, involves assuming an everyday, lived commitment to anti-racist activity.¹⁹

Critical whiteness scholars have recognized that there are limitations to the psychological approaches to the study of whiteness, however. Coming to consciousness about white privilege and the necessity of engaging in anti-racist work is a difficult, uneven, and complex process. The “psychology of whiteness” cannot be summed up with narratives written by whites about their own racial identity development or with Helms’ neat, tidy, and somewhat static theory that outlines specific identity “statuses.” In fact, given the complex and omnipresent nature of white supremacy in United States culture, white people inevitably will

embody and reject various “statuses” and levels of awareness at different moments in time.

Psychological approaches to the study of whiteness are potentially reductive. Pondering one’s whiteness can become a lethal naval-gazing, a privileging of privilege that leads to nothing more than publishing opportunities and reification of white power structures, in effect, a “fetishizing” of whiteness (Clark 4). Some might ask, how can white people work to dismantle the dominating power of whiteness (as whiteness studies purportedly attempts to do) when they are giving so much time and energy *focusing* to that whiteness?²⁰

The critique of whiteness studies as self-centered, short-sighted, and possibly even self-congratulatory is crucial; however, it does not negate the value of working to learn about the intimate and intricate characteristics of white supremacy. From a psychological approach, whiteness studies supports individuals in their attempts to understand themselves, and by extension others, with the goal of challenging white supremacy in particular people in particular places. The critique of the danger of solipsism enriches critical white studies by giving whiteness studies scholars a fuller picture of the complexities of their work, and the potential pitfalls they must (constantly) struggle against.

White supremacy involves much more than individual mistakes and individual identities—psychological features of whiteness, as Thompson might name them. Material/structural and discourse analyses, the other approaches to the study of whiteness as defined by Thompson, are less interested in the

individual white person's orientation toward race and more concerned with the "social mechanisms" that advance white normativity (Thompson "Review"). From the perspective of material/structural analysis, scholars investigate the social apparatuses (such as government, education, etc.) that perpetuate white supremacy. One of the most prominent scholars in whiteness studies, David Roediger, has been especially influential in examining the social, political, and economic benefits—the "wages"—that accompany whiteness. Being white "pays" in this society. However, it pays some more than others. That is, being white benefits most those whites who also have socio-economic privilege.

To counter this, scholars such as Roediger and Ignatiev & Garvey engage in discourse analyses that go as far as to call for an "abolition" of the concept and enactment of whiteness, altogether.²¹ This call coincides with the landmark work of critical race theorists Michael Omi and Howard Winant who investigate the social construction of the concept of race. While earlier scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois introduced and grappled with the complex social and political nature of race, many have continued to essentialize race, to see it as a specific feature accompanied by natural, biological, and essential characteristics. For example, white supremacists see Blacks as inherently lazy, ignorant, violent, and biologically incapable of intellectual equality with whites. While many, if not most, whites still hold essentialized views about race, scholars in whiteness studies, thanks especially to Omi and Winant, understand that racial identity is not fixed at birth but arrived at through, among other things, discursive constructions. Racial formation is a distinct process that happens over time. In the United States, for

example, race became a useful concept when it was to the white person's benefit to equate African Americans' skin color with negative connotations. Darker skin color became a signifier of a group of people defined as fundamentally inferior and dangerous, thus suitable for slavery. Although a construction, whiteness studies scholars understand that race is not something that can simply be "abolished"; instead, it is to all people's benefit, according to Omi and Winant, to learn more about the "continuing significance and changing meaning of race" (3).

Perhaps the most exciting revelations come when we combine all three approaches as defined by Thompson—the psychological, the structural/material, and discourse analysis—to learn about the complex forms and functions of whiteness. Because education involves dealing with individual learners, a psychological approach helps teachers to recognize the various forces and struggles they and their students encounter. As whiteness studies reminds us, whiteness has developed and changed over time in the lives of individuals who *compose* the realm of the social—the larger social structures and forces that enforce white supremacy in us. Therefore, a study of how those structures create and are created by individuals in both material and psychological forms is most beneficial for a more comprehensive understanding of whiteness.

The call for critical work in whiteness studies came a long time ago, well before Marilyn Frye defined the persistent and oppressive languages of whiteness as "whiteliness." In *Black on White*, Roediger provides examples of the long history of racist injustice being questioned by writers, not surprisingly African

American writers such as Du Bois and James Baldwin, who have felt perhaps most keenly the effects of white racism. Contemporary African American author Toni Morrison echoes the sentiments of the writers in *Black on White* in her monograph *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, a critical text which earned Morrison the Nobel Prize in Literature and is cited by some as the most significant call for an academic exploration of whiteness in the literary canon that continues to dominate American education. Examining notions of whiteness in late 19th and 20th century American literature, *Playing* is premised on the notion that language itself (and thus literature) is always already “interested” and inflected by power relations. In the field of rhetoric and composition, many of us understand that we are *constructed* by language as we use it. Morrison’s goal is to “learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, and determined chains” (xi).

Morrison recognizes whiteness in the “canon debate” as supporters of the traditional canon fight to maintain the American tradition of white male dominated education. The very concept of Americanism is buttressed by the idea that it is distinctly “white,” distinctly separate from what Morrison terms “black presence.”²² However, that separate “black presence” serves as the host for the parasite that is whiteness. Morrison’s work makes visible the white male (and female) writer’s reliance on *Othering* for the creation and maintenance of self and literature. The white writer’s power comes from learning to “imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar” (15); thus white Americans have formulated a brand of Africanism for themselves that is “strongly urged,

thoroughly serviceable, companionably ego-reinforcing, and pervasive” (8). Morrison suggests that, in truth, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer” (17). In other words, white writers (and by extension, white people, in general) create Africanist personas as reflections of themselves while also developing a “studied indifference” about race. This indifference maintains the silence about white supremacy and evades an African presence while simultaneously depending upon it (9).

As previously discussed, Morrison shows us that, when faced with the reality of this hushed yet pervasive and deadly racist Othering, critics have tended to focus on the effects of racism on its *victims* rather than on the privileged; Morrison issues a call for a turning of the tables: an examination of “the impact of racism on those who perpetrate it” (11). After all, as we are reminded by Thompson, “it’s [not] just the guy at the other end of the boat who’s sinking” (“Not” 533).

At the same time that Morrison was calling for a scholarly investigation of whiteness in the early 1990s, educators were continuing to develop and struggle over another predecessor to whiteness studies—multicultural education. Multicultural education is fueled by the philosophy that good education is education that learns and teaches about the world from a variety of cultures and perspectives, not just traditional, white European ones. However, white supremacy is reinforced when multicultural education morphs into a white educator’s orientalism, a glomming onto non-white cultures and people as

artifacts of study that must be added onto or *incorporated into* curricula. Cultures different from the white norm are considered educational “material” or “spice” that makes the white educator’s classroom “casserole” more flavorful. Morrison’s work demonstrates white people’s tendency of glomming onto the Other by engaging in a close reading of several traditional, western canonical texts that rely on flattened, stereotypical notions of the “black presence.”²³ A similar examination of most multicultural classrooms might reveal the same type of parasitical behavior.

Whiteness studies has the potential for making important moves away from the treacherous tendency of essentializing cultures and Othering those without white skin privilege. Instead of relying on racist assumptions about Others, when whiteness studies turns the critical gaze away from the Other, and toward the *perpetrators* of racism, it offers insights into the ways that racism, specifically whiteness, is performed in the everyday lives of white people. By extension, whiteness studies can inform educators (and thus students) about racism both in and beyond the classroom and, in turn, lead to real-world, everyday solutions to the violent, racist status quo in United States society today.

Whiteness studies scholars understand that in this world where race is socially constructed, it is a given that white people will be socialized into racism. However, as has been suggested, not enough work has been done in theorizing whiteness in terms of its affective dimensions. Concerted efforts need to be made to begin to understand how affect is implicated in the normalization of

white supremacy. This dissertation asks several questions. What are the “quiet every-day ways” in which the white race is taught that it is superior (Isaksen 34)? How are affective dimensions of whiteness made manifest in our cultures and our lives and thus in our classrooms? What are the implications of this whiteness in our schools? What affective dimensions support and encourage white students in their enforcement of white privilege? Furthermore, what various and sometimes conflicting perspectives on whiteness do white teachers bring to their colleagues, their research, their classrooms, and the educational system in general? How does affect shape those perspectives? How does it dictate the curricula our teachers choose, and how do those curricula reinforce white supremacy?

The question at hand in this work is, what is it that we can say about whiteness in terms of its affective dimensions? A better understanding of affect and whiteness, I contend, can help us to know more about the affective states that inspire, accompany, and continue to fuel racism. What is it that we can learn about affective states that might actually help people to *free* themselves and/or others from whiteness and, by extension, racist attitudes and behaviors? Whiteness is often a manifestation of white people’s socially constructed ignorance to the reality of everyday racism; it is subtle and therefore an all the more insidious complacency with today’s racist status quo. In the theater of academia, acknowledging affective realms of whiteness can assist white teachers, students, and administrators in finding new ways of being that are not fueled by racism as much as by *anti*-racism. Acknowledging affective motivations

and responses and then examining and critiquing them is a powerful component of anti-racist work that is crucial for us in (and beyond) our profession.

It is possible to gain greater knowledge of oppressive systems in general by identifying specific affective patterns of whiteness as they are revealed in and through people. Current scholarship lacks significant investigations into the realm of affect and its ties to race. Honing in on affective features of whiteness is a method of coming to new knowledge, knowledge that supports decolonizing ourselves and others from the dominant ideologies of the “everyday” that shape all United States “citizen-subjects” today.²⁴

Envisioning My Project: Delineating Affective Dimensions of Whiteness in the Cultural Studies Writing Classroom and the Academy

In chapter two of this project I turn to the white students in the cultural studies writing classrooms. A close look at their orientations toward multiculturalism and anti-racist education and a consideration of the affective dispositions motivating these orientations reveals key components of whiteness in today’s college classrooms. As mentioned earlier, the majority of college students in today’s classrooms are familiar with one of education’s favorite, and often empty, buzzwords: “multiculturalism.” Many students experience multicultural education more like a form of torture they must endure than a

broadening of perspective. When teachers incorporate multicultural education as part of an anti-racist pedagogy, many white students exhibit a dangerous apathy to the subject matter at hand.

Often this apathy is accompanied by an adherence to the myth of meritocracy that Peggy McIntosh, among others, has highlighted as a key component of white supremacy. In this chapter I point out signs of cultural narratives of myths of meritocracy, the American Dream, and rugged individualism, and I discuss the implications of these myths for students' educational development. These three cultural narratives are closely linked with denial and they limit what students can learn about themselves and the world around them. In tandem with these myths is the notion of "color-blindness," what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls "color-blind racism," or "racism without racists." Bonilla-Silva's research into the perpetuation of racism includes significant study into the mistruths that white people tell themselves and each other about their own lives. Claiming to be "color blind," for example, allows students to diminish the experiences of people of color and continue to engage in rituals of whiteness that keep them immune to self-critique and the reality of racism in their own lives and, by extension, in the lives of those around them.

Those students who do not claim color-blindness and exhibit apathy about racism are often also angry, very angry, at being asked to examine a social structure that they have been constructed to see as natural and, what is more, immutable. When discussing McIntosh's work, for example, many are resentful

and have great difficulty grasping the reality that privilege and oppression even exist in our society, let alone in their own lives. In this chapter episodes from my own classrooms illustrate the numbed out, or, on the other side of things, quite intense responses that white students have to multiculturalism and anti-racist education. I give examples of clinging to individualism and the omnipresent myths of meritocracy and the American Dream in student writing as well as in classroom discussions, and I discuss the culture of politeness, citing examples of how it functions to re-assert whiteness in the cultural studies writing classroom.²⁵

Chapter three of this work offers an analysis of white teachers' enactments of whiteness. Well-known figures in Rhetoric and Composition such as Maxine Hairston argue that our classrooms are not and must not be a place for politics. In reality, many (if not most) teachers of writing today echo Hairston's sentiments. Their reticence to engage in real-world critique demonstrates the white privilege that accompanies the dis-ease many experience surrounding race, class, gender, and sexuality in everyday life, and thus in academic life, as well. For most white teachers, the overwhelming tendency to see the classroom as a place devoid of politics and the subsequent turn away from anti-racist work supports an avoidance (and thus a perpetuation) of the reality of white normativity. I discuss recent conversations among academics as well as slightly older debates among scholars such as Maxine Hairston who are openly opposed to investigating issues of culture, politics, and society in the classroom. I continue to investigate affective dimensions of this debate, and demonstrate the ways the underlying affective dispositions of arguments made recently by noted scholars in

our field such as Joseph Harris actually share subtle yet dangerous characteristics with persistent and discriminatory dominant ideology. Though Hairston and Harris seem radically different in their pedagogical projects, Harris' notion of a "return to intellectual practice," can be read as a common component of whiteness: a fear of "coming out of the closet" in the classroom with one's political beliefs. Avoiding "politics" and "anti-racist" work assists white teachers in negotiating feelings of comfort, safety, security, fear, and denial with relative ease.

In addition to highlighting specific affective dispositions that accompany the decision to not openly "deal with" whiteness in their pedagogy, in this chapter, I also look at the ways that white teachers talk to each other about race and racism. A yearning for feelings of professional solidarity, support, and security often fuel whiteness, racist beliefs, and their resulting expression.

In chapter three I also reflect on affective motivations for white teachers' steadfast and stubborn adherence to a notion of Standardized English that reifies racism in the profession, in their classrooms, and thus in society at large. The majority of teachers of writing are unaware of the resolutions made by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication regarding standardized English. Instead, teachers of writing often openly denigrate any discourse not reflective of the standard. Most teachers of writing do not know about NCTE's careful attention to language. Instead of standard English, NCTE now uses the words standardized

English to reflect the reality that there are *people* behind language, and what they do to and with language affects us all. The people with the most social power are the ones who can *standardize* language, and their discourse is put forth consistently as the standard by which all others should be judged. I do not argue against language standards *per se* in this dissertation. Instead, I consider how many teachers make sense of the issue of standardized English. Unaware of or purposefully at odds with the CCCC's Students' Right to Their Own Language Resolution, teachers of writing do damage every day as they reinforce the notion that standardized English is superior. Simply put, teachers exhibit whiteness when they judge as sub par those who communicate less "fluently" in standardized English. The implications of this discrimination are far-reaching. For starters, students not fluent in standardized English have less success in school and on placement exams. Perhaps even more troubling is what we have learned from noted linguist Geneva Smitherman and rhetoric and compositionist Keith Gilyard: students who are not fluent in Standardized English pay a high price in terms of their own self-esteem and sense of identity. Chapter three discusses teachers' enforcement of white supremacy in the ways that they perceive standardized English and students of color in the classroom. Finally, chapter three examines the ways that white teachers enact whiteness through seemingly benign classroom activities such as assigning groupwork and mispronouncing their students' names while taking attendance.

Chapter four of this dissertation defines and discusses the powerful role that a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can play in cultural studies writing

classrooms. The work draws on the writings of Steve Mailloux and Richard Rorty to demonstrate the always already rhetorical (and thus political) nature of teaching, learning, and everyday life. In addition, I introduce Stanley Fish's work as a fascinating complement to Mailloux and Rorty's ideas about language, contingency, and the omnipresent reality of rhetoric. In *Justifying Belief*, Gary Olson discusses Fish's ideas about belief as conviction, as that which has "the strongest hold on us." These ideas about belief and conviction support my definition of affect as thinking, feeling, and judgment intertwined (Olson 77). It is not rationality that leads us to think what we think; conviction or belief systems (in my words, affective dispositions) accommodate and justify various world views.

Critical pedagogue Debra Jacobs' work in writing process pedagogy is valuable theory and methodology for creating opportunities for students to actively investigate their "affective constructions," and "quotidian [everyday, status quo] consciousness." Jacobs argues that writing process pedagogies offer opportunities for "intervention" and the "disruption" of world views constructed in and through dominant ideology. Invention practices help students "raise questions about their taken-for-granted understanding" (671). Herein lies the value of "requir[ing] interventions over time that disrupt the quotidian stream of consciousness—processual interventions that include critical inquiry into ways of reading processes and products (and their means of production)" (670). In the cultural studies writing classroom, students are invited to investigate their own ideologies and the ideologies of the worlds around them. There is a danger, though, in cultural studies and critical writing pedagogies becoming their own

Master Narratives.²⁶ In truth, we will never know “the truth” or step outside the dominant culture’s ideology fully. However, there is still great value in thinking about the contingent and situated “truths” of everyday life:

The critically aware person understands that “truth” is contingent and socially constructed, and this understanding is itself thought to be emancipatory. It is not that the critically aware person can escape the force of ideology; it’s that critical awareness makes a qualitative difference in one’s life. (23)

A critical, feminist, anti-racist writing pedagogy that acknowledges and investigates affective dispositions toward whiteness has powerful, liberating potential for students and teachers. Chapter four discusses the theories that can lead to the pedagogy I envision. Sandoval understands the value of “reading” dominant society in an effort to reveal oppressive cultural codes. Her theory of “love as a hermeneutic,” with its complex “methods” or “technologies,” is especially useful. While the notion of “love” in the context of pedagogy can and should be met with skepticism, Sandoval’s theorization of the complexity of love is, ultimately, enlightening. Additionally, an extraordinary number of feminist theorists have written about the power of “love” and coalition, work that is especially helpful for theorizing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that seeks to foster democratizing social change.

Chapter five of this dissertation discusses feminist critiques of issues surrounding pedagogies founded on an ethic of care, which I believe are closely

related to my definition of a pedagogy informed by Sandoval's love as a hermeneutic. Women, or so the culturally dominant narrative goes, are naturally more nurturing than men. One feminist critic, Carol Gilligan, has helped us to see the way that women's moral development is socially constructed to be more relational than men's. Therefore, some feminist theorists cite Gilligan and others and argue that nurturing women may have the potential to be more effective, supportive teachers. I argue against the essentialism inherent in an approach that understands and appreciates women as naturally more nurturing than men. Furthermore, I discuss the whiteness that accompanies a simplistic, essentialist theory of nurturing and pedagogy. Thompson points out the fact that most feminist theorists championing a pedagogy founded on an ethic of care are middle class white women whose work continues, instead of disrupts, the tradition of an apolitical, non-confrontational, "whitely" pedagogy. The critiques against pedagogies based on an ethic of care enrich my pedagogical theory that continues to value theories that consider love, an ethic of care, and relationality. Therefore, in this final chapter I draw on feminist theorists who politicize an ethic of care—an essential component of critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy—which I argue can be instrumental for any teacher involved in anti-racist education.

Ultimately, I posit a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical theory that incorporates Chéla Sandoval's notion of love as a hermeneutic. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval offers a set of what she terms "technologies" that can work in coalition to bring about positive social change. Sandoval is one of several feminist critics today who are investigating love in their theories and in

contemporary culture, at large. Drawing on the work of Sandoval, Boler, hooks, and Thompson especially, I argue that acknowledging and studying affect and its political dimensions empowers teachers and students and provides a framework for enacting a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that works in service of positive, democratizing social change.

Chapter Two: White Students “Doing” Whiteness: Investigating Affective Dimensions of White Supremacy

“Go Home Niggers.” These are the words painted on a banner that greeted a class of first-year students moving onto their new college campus in fall 2003 at the University of Maryland. One of the students who decided to stay at the university despite the auspicious greeting, Juliana Njoku, related this incident and various other encounters with racism he and other minority students experienced at the racially and ethnically diverse University of Maryland campus. That same year, among other hate crimes, “unknown culprits” scribbled racist slurs on an Asian students’ message board and splattered blood on the dorm room doors of a gay residence hall assistant (“Hate”).

More hateful sentiments—escalating from verbal harassment to physical violence at the well-known SUNY Maritime College—followed the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States. Twenty-one middle-Eastern students quit the college after several of them were severely beaten (one was slashed) in the middle of the night by gangs of intruders in their dorm rooms (“Hate”).

“You read about [hate crimes like] this in history books, but it is hard to imagine that [they] could still occur in the new millennium,” said Camille Adams, the executive director of the University of Maryland’s Black Student Union (“Hate”).

As Adams suggests, it *is* often difficult, for white people especially, to imagine that hate crimes are happening all the time and that the numbers of incidents of hate are actually increasing.²⁷ As whites, *per se*, they are not the

targets who must experience and fear these crimes, and many “of us” want to believe in progress; white people (among others) want to believe that “things are getting better.” The statistics, however, reveal a different story—that hate crimes are occurring all the time on college campuses across the country and that most of them are committed by young white people under the age of 22 (“Hate”). In fact, college campuses are actually the third most popular “venue” for hate crimes in the United States today (“Hate”).

Unquestionably, the statistics contradict the ethos of most of the students with white skin privilege who sit in college classrooms today and claim that racism is simply a thing of the past, including students like “mine” at the University of South Florida, where hate crimes have occurred during Black History month, in addition to other times, for the last two years.²⁸

In this chapter, I use student newspaper coverage of the recent hate crimes at my campus to introduce my discussion of affective dimensions of whiteness exhibited by white students in the cultural studies writing classroom. Beyond the overt racism that the hate crimes on my campus and many others across the country display, class discussions and student writing about these crimes reveal the predominance of very common and covert white supremacist attitudes and beliefs fueled by white privilege and exhibited by many white students today.

In this chapter I work to uncover affective dispositions that support white students’ beliefs about race and racism in contemporary United States society. I consider the apathy and indifference as well as the denial and defensiveness that

students exhibit related to issues of white privilege in our culture. For example, I discuss white students' general reticence to multiculturalism and anti-racist education, and I examine affective dispositions related to student learners' attitudes about the hate crimes on our campus. I draw upon the work of feminist theorists Megan Boler and Sandra Bartky, among others, to discuss the apathy and denial many white students exhibit related to discussions of white privilege and contemporary United States society. I also consider sources that encourage these affective dispositions. For example, advertising media inspires in us a sense of "lack" and a desire for products that promise to make and/or keep us (and our students) more in line with the dominant, white status quo. Additionally, hyper-capitalist culture's increasing influence on the educational sphere has led to more detached, over-rationalized schooling environments that serve the interests of the white supremacist order. In this chapter I also identify three powerful cultural narratives that work in combination to fuel white students' affective investments in whiteness. The first narrative involves the myth of the rugged individualist; this is a myth that surfaces and resurfaces in a variety of forms in class discussions and in student writing. The concept of white people's "color-blindness" supports the second myth: the widely-held belief that the United States is a meritocracy. Directly related to rugged individualism and the notion of the United States as a meritocracy is the third myth of the "American Dream" where financial success can be attained supposedly by anyone who works hard enough to get it. These three dominant cultural narratives or myths may be recognized as dominant United States ideologies, and they are closely linked

with affective dispositions (apathy, defensiveness, blame, and denial) that continue to reinforce white privilege and simultaneously limit students' growth potential. I relate examples of students' white supremacist affective dispositions that come from actual classroom discussions and student journal writing and provide examples of the varieties of arguments students cling to as they attempt to justify their own white privilege and distance themselves from racism.

I also relate patterns of the culture of "politeness" in the college writing classroom. Ryden's coinage of the term "culture of politeness" and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's concept of "color-blind racism" as "racism lite"—or "racism without racists"—are especially relevant for discussions of the whiteness made manifest by white students in today's college classrooms. The culture of politeness, similar to what educational theorist Alice McIntyre terms the "culture of niceness," is, no doubt, a prevalent form of whiteness that works to perpetuate the United States' white supremacist status quo. However, before I begin to discuss the various affective dimensions of whiteness exhibited by white students in the cultural studies writing classroom, I want to foreground potential dangers of my approach.

Thanks to educational theorist and whiteness studies scholar Audrey Thompson's review of *Off White*, I am reminded of the danger of climbing up on a "high horse" and distancing myself from my students. Before beginning to unpack issues surrounding white supremacy and the cultural narratives and affective dispositions that support it in white students, I feel compelled to introduce an important "self check" inspired by Thompson's work. Distancing ourselves, I

suggest, is more common than most writing teachers recognize, and I fear that I may sometimes fall into this trap in this chapter, as well as the next.

By definition, anti-racist teachers have more awareness about white privilege structures than most of our white students have; we must have this awareness if we are going to work to lead students to creating new knowledge about their own whiteness and the whiteness in the world(s) around them. However, along the way we should also work against losing sight of what my colleagues and I sometimes, perhaps often, forget: that teachers are in the classroom to learn as much as we are to teach. As a financially privileged, white woman scholar, it is in many ways easy and relatively risk free to teach against and write about the whiteness that I see my students exhibiting. Related to this privilege is a self-righteousness that sometimes arises when teachers encounter blatant racism exhibited by learners in our classrooms. In the review mentioned earlier, Thompson points to what Faye Crosby discusses in her chapter in *Off White* titled “Confessions of an Affirmative Action Mama.” There are “limitations [to] an anti-racist pedagogy that positions the teacher self-righteously against the student” (Thompson “Review”). To call teacher self-righteousness “limiting” is, no doubt, an understatement. Thinking about her own whiteness and its implications for the anti-racist work she engages in, Crosby acknowledges that white teachers can and do reinforce white normativity in a multitude of ways all the time. It is much easier, both psychically and materially, to sublimate the presence of white supremacy, but I think it is vital to recognize that I (indeed, all white teachers) often reinforce my (our) privilege without realizing that we do. I write this chapter

with the realization that I sometimes collude with white students in the reification of white privilege and that I may often do it at the same time that I exhibit the kind of self-righteousness that sometimes accompanies anti-racist pedagogy.²⁹

Crosby ponders the quandary of the white person fighting against racism who is always already a symbol and perpetrator of it, and she concedes that “whether or not I am a raging racist, I am certainly an enormous egoist” (182). I think what she means by this is that she is sometimes self-reflexive about her whiteness to the point of solipsism. Perhaps it is sometimes necessary to be an enormous egoist in order to muster and/or bolster the courage it takes to engage in anti-racist teaching in a pro-racist society. However, the enormous ego of whiteness must also always be in check. I attempt to keep my own whiteness in check in this chapter and in this work as a whole as I identify, explicate, and critique “whiteness” in the cultural studies writing classroom and in the profession in general.

White Students’ Apathy, Defensiveness, Blame, and Denial

Outside the student center at the large, urban Florida university where I teach, students and teachers can relax on benches by a fountain that neighbors a sculptural tribute of a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. Into a dark marble wall is etched a long excerpt from King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech. The section of campus was named by university officials as MLK Plaza; and two years ago, during Black Emphasis Month, (still) anonymous culprits vandalized the large

bust of the civil rights activist. In fact, the bust has actually been stolen and replaced by the university on more than one occasion.

Last year, at the start of Black Emphasis Month, a noose was hung in a tree outside Magnolia Apartments, a newly built on-campus housing facility (bearing the same name as many southern slave plantations). News coverage of the hate crime was slow to emerge; nearly a week after the noose was found, articles about the noose and students' reactions to it appeared in *The Oracle*, the university's student-run newspaper. One student stated in an interview that he was not surprised by the hanging of the noose because of racial tensions at the housing facility. In fact, he said that he had witnessed a late night argument between a white male and black female that fall which ended in the man telling the woman "to shut up or 'I'll hang you like I hung your mother'" (Meehan, "Rope"). Another student stated that he had seen "interracial fights in the courtyards [and heard] white males using the n-word loudly in the residents' parking lot," just a few hundred yards from the MLK bust (Meehan, "Rope"). The following explication of both the newspaper coverage of the hate crime and the student responses to it in class and in their writing reveals that many white students exhibit apathy, denial, blame, and defensiveness in response to the crimes. In addition, their responses reveal their beliefs in the dominant cultural narratives discussed above.

Not insignificantly, the university's news reporting about the most recent hate crime suggests that many people were denying the fact that the noose was a noose at all. The first article that appeared in the paper quotes a young woman

as minimizing and denying the hate crime by saying that the hanging of the noose was “just somebody being stupid and playing some dumb prank” (Meehan “Students, Administrators”). Published a few days later, another headline seems to corroborate the young woman’s suggestion that the hanging of the noose was not a serious issue. It reads: “Rope was used as swing before ‘noose’ was found.” Not insignificantly, the noose is identified as a “rope” first in the headline, and scare quotes surround the word “noose,” again emphasizing that there could be questions about whether the noose was a noose.

The following day’s article presents graphic images and a headline that are further evidence of denial about the noose’s reality. See Figure 2.



Figure 2

The graphic, while it does label the noose as a noose, represents in symbolic form the skepticism that many had about the reality or perhaps “severity” of the hate crime. Seemingly, the fact that the noose found on campus had a knot or two fewer than a “real” noose was enough to inspire some to suggest that the noose *was not* a noose. Similar to other newspaper coverage of the hate crime,

the headline in Figure 2 does not identify the noose as a noose but as a “rope,” instead. The reporter, or the newspaper editors, or perhaps the university’s lawyers seem to want to deny that the rope tied into a noose is indeed a noose.

Notice also the content of the headline, “Student Who Hung Rope Says Judgment Unfair.” While no “judgments” had been made—beyond members of the Black Student Association expressing their concern to the university’s president over the hate crime—the white student quoted in the article is obviously defensive. Speaking under the condition of anonymity, in the article the student is quoted as saying that he and his friend had built a rope swing there and cut it down; someone else, he thought, had tied another knot in the rope and put it back up in the tree. The student also told the reporter that he had “been targeted by other residents who were holding [him and his friend] responsible for what they interpret[ed] as an act of racial malice” (“Student”). One might wonder why the students had built the swing at all considering that a swing set stands just a few hundred yards away from where the homemade swing was fabricated and the noose was later hung. The headline, the graphic, and the notion put forth by many that the noose can and perhaps *should* be interpreted as something *other* than an “act of racial malice” all prove the point. Folks, white folks especially, want to deny that a hate crime was perpetrated at all.

The headline of the final article covering the hate crime reads “Noose Mystery Comes to an End,” and explains that the student who put the knot in the rope and hung it in the tree “had had hobbies—sailing or whatnot—and saw the

rope and just tied it” (Meehan, “Noose Mystery”). According to the article, the student was “referred” to the university’s Student Judicial Services office. Any disciplinary action that may have been taken against him is confidential according to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (Meehan, “Noose Mystery”). No more articles have appeared in the paper, if there was any disciplinary action taken against the student it has been kept confidential, and no one seems to be discussing the hate crime on campus anymore.

Amanda, a traditionally college-aged white woman student in her first year on campus arrived in my class visibly distressed the day after the news story about the hate crime broke.³⁰ Normally smiling and talkative before class, Amanda sat somewhat hunched over in her desk, one shoulder pressed against the wall, her eyes scouring the tops of her tennis shoes. Based on previous class discussions, I knew that Amanda lived at the site of the hate crime, and I had a sense that she was not comfortable with the discussions I had led previously about race, ethnicity, and white privilege structures in the United States. In fact, earlier class interactions had revealed that Amanda did not believe that racism existed at all “anymore.” The belief that racism does not exist “anymore” is widespread among my white students today and is a prevalent form of white denial in and beyond our classrooms. As I have indicated, denial of the reality of racism is one of the most common affective dispositions related to whiteness. It is supported by and simultaneously integral to whiteness and a disposition that I consider throughout this dissertation.

I was feeling a bit stunned by the news of the hate crime, so I decided to put off what we had been planning to “cover” that day in an attempt to turn the hate crime and ensuing newspaper coverage into a teachable moment.

“So, what do you think about ‘all of this’?” I asked. Many of the students stared at me with blank faces. On previous occasions when we had talked about race, the almost-inevitable response from at least a few white students involved a denial or dismissal of the concept of race privilege altogether. One day, a white student had suggested (and several had nodded their heads in agreement) that, similar to a basic math or geography course, he had learned what he needed to know about multiculturalism already and that there was no such thing as racism “these days.” Another white student had mentioned our class discussions about race privilege in a piece of reflective writing: “I’ve had enough multicultural courses to last a lifetime,” he lamented. I have found this to be one of the most common responses made by today’s white students in response to multicultural or anti-racist education. An interview-based study by Levine and Cureton supports my observation. Levine and Cureton state that when asked about multicultural education many white students complain that “‘diversity has been shoved down their throats’ by high school teachers, parents, and society in general” (Whitt *et al.* 173). When we talk about race in my classes, it is quite common for several white students to actually roll their eyes and declare that they are “tired of multiculturalism.” Instead of commenting on some of the students’ obviously apathetic responses to the hate crime that day, I turned to Amanda.

“What’s going on at Magnolia?” I queried. “What has the mood been like since the noose was hung?”

“It’s terrible,” she said. Her voice was high-pitched and strained, “Black students are going through doors ahead of me and just letting them shut in my face! I mean, give me a break. Why do they even think it’s a noose, anyway? It was just a piece of rope, not some big hate crime like they’re making it out to be.” Obviously, Amanda was exhibiting both defensiveness about and denial of the crime.

Unfortunately, but almost predictably after Amanda’s comments—and thanks in no small part to the ambiguous newspaper coverage—the question at hand in class that day quickly became not what the effects of the hate crime were but, remarkably, whether it had even been a hate crime, at all. The arguments that Amanda and other students put forth are telling.

“You know, lots of people at this school are from the country,” suggested Nichole, a non-traditionally aged white woman student. (Our university is in an urban location, and the majority of the students are not from rural areas.) “In the country, hunters have to know how to make nooses so they can hang their prey in the trees.” Nichole also wanted to deny and explain away the reality of the noose. “They hang nooses all the time so they can drain their blood and protect them from other animals,” she stated.

Before I could respond, Amanda chimed in and changed the subject. She said that the black students were acting very rudely and taking “it” out on her since the hate crime had occurred. They were not only “slamming” doors on her

but also glaring at her or, conversely, not making eye contact with her at all when they passed her in the hallways. Amanda was obviously upset—she said as much—and she felt she was being unfairly blamed as a white woman who happened to live at Magnolia.

“Do you know how to tie your shoes?” She directed the question toward me emphatically.

“Do you?” she demanded and then waited for me to respond. I looked at her and waited for her to continue. “Well if you do, then you could just as easily tie some knots in a rope, and it wouldn’t mean a thing! The problem here is that some people are just trying to make a big deal over this and blame us! They’re *choosing* to think it’s a noose! Those people from the Black Student Association are making a big deal about nothing at all.”

At this point I moved our discussion toward the issue of white privilege, defensiveness, and denial. Because they had never lived as targets constantly under the threat of racial violence, my white students literally could not fathom why so many were so upset about the noose. I suggested to the students that white privilege keeps white people immune to the suffering associated with racism. Members of the campus’ Black Student Association were upset, I explained, because for students of color the noose was a very loaded symbol, much more so than it was for whites.

“But still, a rope *is* just a rope,” one white student exclaimed.

“And if it *was* intended to symbolize a noose,” another argued, “whoever put it up there was just some whacked out racist.” These white students were clearly distancing themselves from the hate crime in every way possible.

Similar to Amanda, another young woman whom I will call Theresa was also quite defensive. “Why is it that people are always complaining about racism?” Amanda did not really mean “people” in the generic form; she was referring to people of color without saying the words. “I’m tired of everyone calling everything racism,” she stated in an exasperated tone. Raising her voice further, she continued in an all-too-familiar vein. “*Some people* just can’t get the fact that slavery ended over a hundred years ago! And why do they blame *me* for it? I’m not a slave owner. No one in my family ever had slaves. I never benefited from slavery!”

I knew that Theresa’s defensive affective response was echoing the sentiments of many of my white students (and very possibly some of her classmates in the room who were Eastern European, Hispanic, South American, and Asian American, as well). I did not want her comments to go unchallenged, so at this point I used my authority as the teacher to interrupt Theresa and explain that white people’s wealth and the United States’ economic foundation was built on and supported by slavery.³¹ I reminded the class that economic privilege is passed on through the generations, and I explained that it is passed on in tandem with an entrenched belief in white superiority. At the end of slavery, the people with economic power—white people—worked their hardest to ensure that their power stayed within the boundaries of “their own kind.” I talked about

the fact that this same whiteness is reflected today in, among other places, the United States Labor Bureau's statistics that indicate that men and women of color have less economic power and still earn a lot less money than white men and women.

At this point, it was as though the American Dream itself had materialized in the form of Susan, another young white woman who had sat very quietly in the back of the room so far that semester. The energy level and volume of student voices in the room had raised when Susan slowly raised her hand. Seizing the moment to hear from a "new person," I called on Susan to join our discussion.

"I think what we're really talking about here is work ethic," she said quietly, calmly, and with a chilling self-assurance. The room fell silent as Susan's classmates listened carefully. "It's not about racism. It's about whether people are willing to work hard enough to succeed."

Obviously, the student comments I have relayed here are not all logical or presented by me (or us, that day) in a linear fashion. This, however, is precisely the point of this work. Whiteness does not follow reason; instead, it uses what become believable, logical justifications in service of the affective disposition(s) that accompany white supremacy. The erratic flow of that day's conversation is evidence of the wild leaps that people often make in the heat of debating, discussing, and defending their worldviews. I read these erratic shifts as an indicator of dominant ideologies that are enforced by a racist, capitalist, heterosexist, sexist, ablist, sizist, etc., United States regime.³² Feminist educational theorist Megan Boler coins the term "inscribed habits of emotional

inattention” to describe “embedded, cultural habits of seeing and not seeing” at the same time (“Teaching” 122). All the whiteness at work described in the classroom discussion above reflects whiteness’ power to present itself in a barrage of mismatched arguments white people are all too ready to accept as they “see” and “do not see” simultaneously. These illogical and uneven arguments are evidence of mutually constitutive affective dimensions of whiteness: denial, defensiveness, blame, and apathy.

Although the class discussion I have described above was at times affectively “intense,” the conversation also belies the predominant affective dimension of apathy that white people exhibit when confronted with the reality of white privilege in contemporary United States society. Many of my white students were dismissing and denying easily even the possibility that white privilege exists when it comes to the issues of nooses and hate crimes. White privilege and the noose were not issues that seemed relevant to their lives. Most of the white students still could not understand how loaded the noose was as a symbol, especially for people of color, and they were ready to “move on” to discuss other things.

Indeed, the white students in my classrooms were exhibiting an ever-so-common apathetic affective disposition toward white supremacy. More often than not, white students dismiss their skin color privilege quickly and without feeling; they seem almost “numb.” I believe this numbness is a common characteristic in a culture that consistently devalues the realm of emotion. Educational theorist Ann Berlak seems to concur; she suggests that the United States’ dismissal of

emotions “severs connections between cognition and feeling, and ‘numbs’ white people to injustice” (Berlak 135). Apathy is accepted and even encouraged, perhaps most especially when it comes to challenging entrenched cultural beliefs in the United States’ white supremacist norm.

The “apathy of whiteness” is also a condition which Frederic Jameson describes as characteristic of citizen-subjects who live in late capitalist, post-modern society.³³ The “apathy of whiteness” is fueled by hyper-capitalist consumer culture, which inspires the numbed-out, indifferent disposition toward white supremacy that is evident in so many U.S citizens today. For example, the media bombards us with over 3,000 advertisements a day, advertisements that compel us to attempt to “buy our way into” specific “looks” and thus images and identities. Advertising creates a sense of lack: “if only I had ‘that,’ then I could be like ‘that,’ and ‘that’s’ how I’m supposed to be.”

We are constructed to believe that products should and will make us more “like” what we see on T.V., in movies, on billboards, and in fashion magazines: privileged white people who are fair-haired, blue-eyed, rich, thin, and able-bodied. White students do not escape this social construction; much of the advertising out there targets them specifically.³⁴ Media-driven capitalist consumer culture inspires an indifferent disposition toward white privilege that is evident in many, if not most, white students today. Our buy-buy-buy mentality in turn damages educational systems and the educational experiences our students have.

In hyper-capitalist culture, education has no doubt become an enterprise increasingly attuned to the needs of corporations. As universities are fueled more and more by corporate ideology and as they approach the status of diploma mills and glorified job training sites, students and teachers are trained to value “outcomes-based” education. “Teaching to the test” in elementary, junior high, and high school and relying on culturally-biased standardized tests for college admissions standards also inevitably lead to a consumer-oriented model of teaching and learning that supports dominant, white supremacist, capitalist ideology. This corporate orientation is precisely what prevents teachers from utilizing more engaging and student-centered pedagogies. Writers such as Daniel Liston have considered extensively the implications of oppressive social structures for pedagogy. Liston and Jim Garrison explain in the introduction to *Teaching, Learning and Loving* that

when the instrumental logic that fuels current teaching and assessment reigns, we forget our love of inquiry; [teachers] no longer see students richly and fully; instead of unique individual selves, [they] see standardized, universal ciphers.... Our classroom communities become settings of control, not communities of engaged learning for our teachers and students.

(Liston and Garrison 3)

Often it seems as though our students are not in our classrooms for the sake of inspired learning as much as for the sake of earning the grades necessary to get them that piece of paper that can lead to money-making in the “real world.” This

utilitarian approach to education models the materialist corporate world that is full of inequalities; no doubt these inequalities exist also in the world of education. It is also not news that all students do not have equal access to an equal education. One educator interested in politics and education explicates the situation:

There is no need to belabor the point that the American system of public education is grounded in structural inequality. Nor is there any serious disagreement that the central funding mechanism for public education—local property tax—functions to reproduce, not reduce, inequalities in larger society (Burch 94).

In the United States, the educational system and access to it is “managed on the basis of wealth” (Burch 95). In terms of affect, poor students who grow up in a society where rich people get “better” educations than poor people know intimately the power of dollars in shaping the reality of their lives. Conversely, financially privileged whites have the option of existing in an apathetic bubble, what Boler calls a “comfort zone” that secludes them from the reality of social inequalities (“Teaching” 121). They do not experience discrimination based on their race; therefore, they do not believe discrimination exists. Today’s fast-paced, capitalist corporate culture drives people, class-privileged whites especially, toward finding neat and tidy justifications for the immense and gruesome realities of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and the myriad of other “isms” circulating throughout our culture and our lives.

Apathy, what Boler might consider as the unexamined comfort zone in which many operate, was quite obvious in many of my white students' comments as they tried to steer the conversation away from the noose. Perhaps apathy as a first line of defense is what is most effective in allowing white students to remain oblivious to their skin color privilege. Apathetic white students have the luxury of not engaging with the reality of their privilege. Obviously, not engaging means not having to recognize the ways in which their privilege benefits them on a daily basis. It makes sense: if white people choose not to care, then we do not have to think about *why* we do not care, and if we do not have to think about why we do not care, we do not have to think about what there is to lose (white privilege) if we do care.

Combined with apathy, blame, evident in the comment Theresa made about "people" just "getting over [racism]," is another convenient tool of whiteness. In the blaming mode, white people see the white supremacist structure as something people of color conjure up in their heads, and whites use that to justify inequality—inequality that, thanks to the languages of whiteness, many whites perceive as the result of people of color's inherent inferiority. If there are structural inequalities between whites and people of color, or so the prevailing grammars of whiteness assert, it is because people of color (usually blacks) just cannot let "things" go. "Things" becomes a code word for the racism maintained by the United States' white supremacist power structure. Thanks to this type of blame and denial, for many whites, hate crimes on college campuses

across the country become the fault of people of color who “take things too seriously.”

Bonilla-Silva explain elucidates this pattern of blaming well: “whites have adopted powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justification—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color” (*Racism Without 1*). People of color or other white people get blamed for racial inequality. Theresa’s response, that *if* the noose was a noose at all it was just hung up by some “crazy,” random racist, evidences the deflection common among white students when we talk about race privilege. Over and over again, Others get blamed for oppressive manifestations of whiteness. It is just those “those people” or those distant “crazy racists out there” who should be blamed for tying the noose in a tree.

Closely linked to blame is denial of the notion that there is such a thing as white privilege at all. Writing about anti-racist education, Berlak discusses Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s invaluable contribution to understanding the nuances of denial in their book *Testimony*.³⁵ For Felman and Laub, one key method of coping with the reality of injustice is the concept of “erasure.” Erasure involves “individuals’ failures to perceive, recall, and respond with appropriate empathy to evidence of inhumane treatment” (Berlak 132). Similar to apathy, erasure can be seen at work in our students’ denial of the reality of white privilege in their lives. White people can excuse, dismiss, and just not see racism at work because the reality of racism is “in excess of their frames of reference” (qtd. in Berlak 133). In the context of the critical classroom, again, white students

have not experienced physical or psychological violence because of their skin color. They do not have a frame of reference to accommodate the reality of being hated for being born with their skin color. “Erasure” can be seen over and over as students deny that racism exists in the world(s) around them.

Other key insights about denial come from what Sandra Bartky theorizes as “the phenomenologies of denial.” Bartky breaks denial down into various typologies, including “fantasists” who understand racism to be a thing of the past (Houston 108). Perhaps the most mainstream disposition of my white students, fantasy that racism is in the past, allows whites to rest complacently in their whiteness. “Slavery ended over a hundred years ago!” they exclaim. My students look among their classmates and see gender, racial, and ethnic diversity. Racism cannot possibly be at work “anymore” if various social groups are represented, can it? If we are all in the same room and the United States has no officially sanctioned system of slavery, or so they seem to assume, then we all must be equal.

A similar argument arises when students look at popular culture in the United States. They often say: “Just look around. Today ‘we’ have Denzel Washington, Oprah Winfrey, Beyoncé, and Jennifer Lopez. There’s no such thing as racism anymore,” they exclaim. “If there were, how could those people have made it so big?” These students’ comments reflect what Bartky describes as denial and “cluelessness.” The “clueless” are “those [who] have no effective understanding of racism at all” (qtd. in Houston 108).

Also in denial, the “self-deceivers,” as defined by Bartky, possess an understanding of the reality that there is racism in the world, but they do not see themselves as perpetrators of it. White privilege does exist, but there is nothing they can do about it, and they certainly do not benefit from it personally. In the context of the classroom, “self-deceivers” can be recognized as those who do believe that the noose is a noose in the tree. However, they refuse to consider themselves as privileged or as though their privilege supports white supremacy. I think self-deception as defined by Bartky might actually be the most common form of whiteness today.³⁶

White students’ self-deception is evident when they are able to pinpoint racist acts (such as the noose in the tree or screaming the n-word late at night in the housing facility’s courtyard) but they are not able to see themselves and their skin color as even remotely connected to racism and racist behaviors. “I am not a racist,” they say. I would not “do those things,” they often exclaim with passion. That most of my white students subscribe to the idea that racism is a thing that is “out there” and not “in” them is evidence of the denial of the social structure of whiteness that works to inculcate racism in our everyday lives.

White students often deny the reality of the widespread nature of racism by claiming that it is simply a matter of ignorance, that whites who are racist lack formal education. “I think educated people know that racism is just ignorant,” they often say. In one vein, we might say that racism is not about “ignorance” at all. As I discussed in chapter one, college campuses are the third most popular venue for hate crimes. Moreover, if we buy into the idea that the smartest, brightest, and

most aware people “make it” to Ivy league schools, then we can be certain that racism is not about “ignorance.” The Southern Poverty Law Center’s *Intelligence Report* suggests that it is the “elite schools” that may be the sites of the highest number of hate crimes of all colleges and universities in the country (“Hate”). That colleges and universities with the most prestigious reputations are home to some of the most overt displays of hatred is a telling sign of the insidiousness of white supremacy; it is everywhere, “happening” all the time, even and especially in the places where we might imagine we would find it the least.

Another significant affective dimension of denial is a subconscious fear of the racialized other, a judgment made by whites that people of color are out to get them in some way. “It would be a mistake to underestimate how much fear can be operative in our ‘not knowing what one knows,’” suggests Houston (108). One aspect of white fear might involve the trepidation that if we do recognize the reality of our whiteness we might very well be drowned in the immensity of it, similar to Felman and Laub’s definition of erasure—the denial that accompanies horrific trauma. If we *do not* “drown” in the racism, we may recognize that we will have to assume responsibility for the uphill battle of fighting it. Denial keeps the white person’s fears in check and thus her or his refuge in whiteness intact. Sound bites like “we’re not racists, plain and simple” are prime examples of the ever-present affective state of denial. Fueled by fear, many white people convince ourselves that we do not feel anything at all. We are not responsible for racist acts; therefore, we just do not have to deal with the ugly, devastating social reality of inequality and our part in it.

Joe Feagin and Harnán Vera define the stories of denial that whites use to erase the reality of white privilege and racism as “sincere fictions.” Every semester, students in my classroom reveal their “sincere fictions” when they read Peggy McIntosh’s landmark work on white privilege. In it, McIntosh creates a list of the privileges she has as a middle class white woman—privileges such as being able to show up at a meeting late and not having her tardiness attributed to her race or ethnicity; being able to rent or buy housing without being relegated into certain “colored” areas;³⁷ being able to ensure her children’s safety and immunity from racial or ethnicity-based violence.³⁸ Time and time again, when I give white students writing assignments that ask them to consider themselves in terms of larger social structures and to examine the ideologies they have been schooled in, they have difficulties understanding the concept of privilege, let alone generating a list of their own particular social privileges. My white students do not “feel” any privilege, they say with sincerity, over and over again. When they wake up in the morning, they do not “feel” special. They do not “feel” like they benefit in any way from their skin color. Herein lies one of the magic tricks that whiteness plays. It masquerades as the unmarked category; if it is thoroughly denied and not discussed, if it is not acknowledged, if it is not linked to a lived experience, white privilege does not have to be a legitimate reality, and white people can rest in complacency. As such, white people do not have to challenge perceptions of self or consider what it means to benefit daily from the domination of racialized Others. Thanks to white normativity that encourages what Boler calls “inscribed habits of emotional inattention,” white people do not

have to see what they do not want to. Distancing themselves from skin color privilege absolves white people from taking responsibility for racial and ethnic inequalities and simultaneously reinforces whiteness. White students in my classrooms distance themselves from racism by contending that it is over and done with, an injustice that ended with the Emancipation Proclamation.³⁹ When I suggest that we live in a racist culture, they respond with, “That’s how things *used to be*,” responding in the way that fantasists (as Bartky might label them) do. This justification resembles Theresa’s passionate outburst that slavery ended over a hundred years ago.⁴⁰ Thompson validates observations about students’ denial of their own racism in a culture that deems it “impolite” at best to acknowledge race and issues of racism:

Racism . . . is likely to be seen as a fringe ideology that, while common earlier in the century and lingering in the attitudes of some members of the older generation, is now so unacceptable that it is endorsed only by white supremacist hate groups. Well-meaning whites often note, for example, that it is no longer permissible in polite circles to make derogatory comments about blacks: their grandparents and even their parents may still talk that way, but they themselves are horrified by such talk. (“Review”)

The Culture of Politeness

A major facet of whiteness is maintaining the party line that racism does not exist anymore, and if it does, or so the racist argument goes, it is certainly not a topic for “polite” discussions in “polite company.” “[R]ace is just as important now as it ever was,” writes Vershawn Ashanti Young, “even if both blacks and whites agree to pretend in public that it isn’t. . . . [P]art of the race problem today, perhaps the biggest part, is due to our complicity with this pretense” (693). Toni Morrison seems to agree: “In matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled.... The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous liberal gesture” (“On”). Indeed, it is true that “emotion is tied to, and often modulated by, discourses of politeness and propriety” (Ryden 82). Affective dimensions that constitute whiteness are carefully and quietly controlled in “surfaces of politeness” (Okawa 141). Alice McIntyre goes as far as to call this “culture of niceness” an addiction that “suffocates critique” (McIntyre 40). Whites have no “comfort zone . . . when it comes to discussing white racism,” and so the “culture of niceness” works to support the self-deniers, especially, who can “hide behind a caring [nice] façade instead of dealing with the discomfort of personal racism” (McIntyre 43, 46).⁴¹ Accordingly, whites remain nestled in a comfort zone where only certain, socially approved and “polite” discussions take place.

One of the primary languages of whiteness is *not* acknowledging white people as belonging to a racial group, so when we do talk about race, white people’s discussions almost always focus on the racially marked Other. In quiet collusion, whites identify the racialized Other in lowered voices. They lean in

close and speak in conspiratorial tones. “You know, I think the problem with all the *blacks* on welfare . . . ,” they say as they whisper the word “black.” A somewhat guilty expression comes on their faces, and often, as they whisper, they avert their eyes⁴² and look over their shoulders to make sure no non-white “outsiders” have heard them. Discussing blacks only when discussing the United States’ welfare system is another telling sign of contemporary white supremacy. Whites are assumed to not be on welfare, even though they are the majority of its recipients (“Majority”).

Similar to “polite” discussions, languages of whiteness that mark the racialized Other are ambiguous. The following example illustrates how whiteness can work through vague euphemisms. A relative of mine once described a car accident she had had by stating that, “Some n----- rear-ended me in the parking lot.” A white person who knows it is not “polite” or socially acceptable to use the n-word might instead say something like, “Some *black* guy rear-ended me in the parking lot!” In this case, black became its own racial slur, a negative marker used in a moment of anger to deliver a more “polite” or socially acceptable insult. The discussion about the accident can continue, and the “guy’s” race will not be mentioned again. Whiteness, in this example, is thus enforced through a *lack* of enforcement. By not acknowledging the man’s race again or discussing it further, the insult stands. When confronted about the existence of white privilege structures that allow whites to use the adjective “black” as a subtle weapon, the white person might portray her lack of awareness about the issue: “I wasn’t talking about race,” she might say indignantly, “I was just describing the guy who

hit me.” By denying that the man’s race is not an “issue” in her dismay over the car accident, she maintains white supremacy and exhibits Boler’s inscribed habits of emotional inattention—habits of seeing and not seeing—that allow her to use the word “black” as an implied insult and simultaneously (and quite sincerely) deny that she has done it.

Subtle languages of whiteness such as a white person’s description of a black man who hit her in the parking lot, Susan’s comments about “*some people’s*” lack of work ethic, and Nichole’s opinion that “*some people* just can’t get over slavery” are evidence of ways in which white people “enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding ‘racist’” (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without* 4). In this way, “contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through ‘new racism’ practices that are subtle . . . and apparently nonracial” (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without* 3). This subtlety is perhaps the most prevalent form of whiteness in the college classroom; white supremacy is supported through overt denial of covert ways in which the non-white Other is marked negatively.

A Glimpse Of the Myths: Meritocracy, Rugged Individualism, and the American Dream

Belief in rugged individualism, in the American Dream, and in the notion that the United States is a meritocracy are extremely powerful narratives that

seem to dominate the college classroom, buttressing white students who feel threatened when I ask them to interrogate their own whiteness and their participation in the United States' white supremacist culture. Our students often do not recognize their privileged positions, and when we prompt them to consider privilege and white supremacy, we repeatedly get a glimpse of what we see in the larger white culture: a steadfast tendency to cling to the myth of meritocracy. Worshipping at the alter of St. Pull-Yourself-Up-By-Your-Boots, as indicated earlier, when faced with United States Labor Bureau statistics that confirm that white women consistently earn more money than women in any other racial/ethnic category, students deny racism and refuse to accept the fact that larger (white supremacist) social structures are at work. Instead, like Susan and her comments about "work ethic," most white students equate inequitable pay with individual people of color who lack motivation and a sustained work ethic (Sleeter 162). They make vague references to "those people," almost always non-white people, who do not have "personal strength." Simultaneously, they hold on, almost desperately, it seems, to Horatio Alger stories. Mired in our white, imperialist Nike-culture of *Just Do It*, they cannot, do not, or will not grasp the reality of the everyday circumstances that privilege whites and simultaneously oppress people of color. "Hard work is the only thing that will get you anywhere in life" is the most common refrain I hear as my white students "politely" sidestep the issue of class, race, and contemporary structures of privilege in a white supremacist system.

I often require students to respond to class discussions in the privacy of their journals. The writing assignments work well because they do not allow white students to walk out of class and immediately dismiss the intense and often discomfoting subject matter we explore. The journals also give students the opportunity to voice perspectives they are not comfortable sharing out loud with me or their peers. Thus, the writing compels them to make more personal, repeated, and focused efforts to consider seriously (and often for the first time) the socially taboo topic of white privilege. However, whiteness is nothing if not persistent. And, just as in class discussions, the myth of meritocracy often reigns in their writing. Last spring, one young, white male student's struggle with the concept of race privilege was evident in his journal writing. After the especially heated discussion in class recounted above, Andrew had a lot to say, or write, that is, in his course journal.

Although I had asked students to write two typed pages for this journal entry, Andrew wrote three or four, passion-filled pages. In his journal entry, Andrew explained that his father is a wealthy business man and that Andrew has continued his father's legacy. Andrew recounted a rosy narrative of his own business-building ventures as part of his justification (and denial) of status-quo, white supremacist society. Not more than 21 years old, Andrew owns quite a bit of landscaping equipment and has his own lawn-mowing service which employs several part-time workers.

“What it all really boils down to,” Andrew expressed emphatically in his journal, “is effort!” Denying that he had any privilege because of his white skin color, Andrew asserted that his privilege came in the form of love and support from his father. It was his father who taught Andrew the value of hard work, Andrew exclaimed, when he handed his son a twenty-dollar bill as pay for mowing his family’s lawn when Andrew was a young teen. With those twenty dollars, Andrew purchased more gas for the family lawn mower and started knocking on his neighbors’ doors to solicit customers. Before he knew it, business was booming and today, some six years later, Andrew lives on his own and pays his own rent. It is unclear whether he pays for his own education, but that is a different story.

I recount this event not to belittle Andrew’s experience or the way he recounts it, but because I think his writing provides clear evidence of the ways that students rely on the myth of meritocracy, the American Dream, and the notion of individualism to justify their privilege. Like many white students learning about the concept of privilege for the first time, what Andrew did not consider were the multiple circumstances of privilege that worked in combination to benefit him.⁴³ Andrew did not recognize the fact that he was born into a family that did not rent but owned a house that had a lawn next to other houses that had lawns, too. He was not expected to mow the lawn; he got paid to do it. Andrew did not consider that many of the neighbors who hired him probably saw a reflection of themselves in the young, hard-working white kid who lived next door, and they were probably comfortable hiring him because, chances are, his skin color

matched theirs. Andrew wrote in familiar clichés: he was not privileged, he (all by himself!) had learned the “value of hard work” and a “hard-earned dollar” at the start of his entrepreneurial journey. Indeed, he even overlooked the fact that it was his father who *handed him* that twenty dollar bill in the first place.

The American individualist myth “becomes part of a person’s sense of self” and helps ease the psychic tension or dissonance experienced by those white students who are able to identify white supremacy in United States culture but do not want to believe they benefit directly from it (Boler, “Teaching” 122). Andrew is obviously experiencing psychic tension in his journal (He wrote several pages, not two; he used a multitude of exclamation points, etc.), and the individualist myth helps him overlook the fact that his father handed him money and let him use his equipment to build a business. Andrew is able to avoid any psychic dissonance when he chooses not to recognize that he profits off the excess labor provided by the part-time workers who mow lawns for him. Although he does recognize that his family’s love and support is a privilege many people do not have, he believes that it was his hard work and frugality alone that led him to achieve financial solvency. Andrew is struggling with the reality that race privilege exists. Because he is focusing on his own success and emphasizing his family, his hard work, and his money management skills—specifically in the context of writing about race privilege—Andrew is revealing his prejudicial views that people of color do not work hard, do not understand money, and do not have the family support that he did. In this way, Andrew “softly [O]therizes” and “aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who

[sic] it subjects and those who [sic] it rewards” (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without* 3-4).

Boler also recognizes that students embrace fervently the concepts of rugged individualism, the myths of the American Dream, and the notion of the United States as a meritocracy. These cultural narratives are entrenched deeply and play a significant role in our white students’ world views; therefore, they are the narratives that are the most difficult to “critically challenge” (“Teaching” 123). Based on my experience, I think Boler is right:

Steeped in . . . nationalist myths, students may cling to the myth of the American Dream, to individualism, and to a faith in meritocracy as the arbiter of privilege. Attachment to these myths is not merely cognitive but deeply emotional: The American Dream may be a dream that offers students hope—for their own family; for themselves; or a naïve hope that others, less privileged than themselves, may improve their lot in life if they would only work hard enough. (“Teaching” 118)

If teachers have hopes for inspiring democratizing social change, indeed anti-racist change, in the college classroom, we must recognize that these cultural narratives are a significant affective dimension of white students’ world views. We must be aware of and sensitive to the struggle that privileged white students such as Andrew engage in as they try to make sense of their own lives in the context of critical pedagogies.

Closely tied to enduring concepts of rugged individualism, the myth of meritocracy, and the American dream is what Bonilla-Silva calls “color-blind racism.” Indeed, claiming color-blindness is a common and dominant trait of whiteness. Time and time again, white students emphatically follow up the “I’m not a racist,” comment with this one: “I don’t see color.” They proclaim that they do not notice racial difference; they treat all people the same, as individuals, whether they are black, brown, blue, or purple (Isaksen 25).

To claim to not “see color” is to dismiss the cultural history surrounding race for all people in the United States and abroad. Only white people have the privilege of not thinking about or experiencing discrimination and hate based on their skin color. The concept of color-blindness rejects the reality of violence perpetrated against all people of color in this country, including “people of color” who “became white” over time such as Italian, Irish, and Jewish immigrants to America.⁴⁴

Bonilla-Silva argues that “color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system [of racism] in the post-Civil Rights era” (*Racism Without 3*). It “does what all ideologies do: It helps sustain relations of domination or, in this case, the post-civil rights status quo” (Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy* 12). Bonilla-Silva sees contemporary white supremacist ideology being reinforced by the “individual rights-agenda” adopted by neoconservatives and the New Right (*White Supremacy* 30). Obviously, white college students are not impervious to the color-blind ideology of whiteness, or

“racism without racists,” as Bonilla-Silva might phrase it. Influenced strongly by the ideology of color-blindness, when they suggest that they “don’t see color at all,” white students, often with the best intentions, perpetuate their white privilege.

The culture of politeness allows white students to feel as though they are benevolent, “color-blind” people. In light of the theory of color-blind racism, Susan and Andrew’s statements about “work ethic” take on new meaning. Since it is not overt racism like the Jim Crow racism of the past, color-blindness seems a bit like “racism lite” (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without 3*). However, its effects remain the same:

Instead of relying on name calling, color-blind racism otherizes softly (“these people are human, too”); instead of claiming God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they don’t work hard enough. (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without 3*)

Our white students believe wholeheartedly that the United States is a meritocracy, a country founded on equality. As such, all it takes is a strong work ethic. If we are rugged, tough individuals, and if we work hard enough, we can do anything.

Conclusion

Although white supremacist culture is not acknowledged by most white students, it is ever-present and rigorously regenerative in the classroom and in United States culture at large. The widespread occurrence of hate crimes on college campuses across the country is strong proof of this claim. White supremacist culture encourages the solidification of racist world views through affective dimensions of apathy, denial, defensiveness, and blame. White students practice “inscribed habits of emotional inattention” and usually remain oblivious to the reality of racism

Hyper-capitalist culture supports an obliviousness to white supremacy by bombarding us with images that subtly and sometimes not-so-subtly suggest that whiteness—and richness, and able-bodiedness, etc.—are the ideal norms by which all people should be judged. Enmeshed in this fast-paced, buy-buy-buy culture we become numb to injustice. The educational system and the students in it have not escaped this construction. The classroom is now a “setting of control,” a place where the “love of inquiry” is lost in favor of an obsession with standardized tests and “outcomes” (Liston and Garrison 3). Motivated by a desire to earn “As” and pieces of paper that will secure them high-paying jobs in the “real world,” students often “go through the motions” in the educational system, never learning to engage critically with the world(s) around them. As such, the white supremacist norm remains unchallenged.

White students who are able to recognize the reality of racism develop a variety of justifications for structures of racial inequality, including blaming the non-white Others around them for racism's existence. Perhaps psychically overwhelmed by the reality of white supremacy, students suppress awareness through of erasure, fantasy, and self-deception (Bartky). White people's fear of and anger toward people of color—fears of which whites are usually unaware—fuel a range of defensive arguments that usually blame the Other and work well to maintain white supremacy.

White students embrace the “sincere fiction” that they are not part of the social structure that perpetuates racism. Distancing themselves from an awareness of their skin color privilege, they contend that racism is a thing of the past. Moreover, they support a “culture of politeness” that sublimates the reality of white supremacy. White students are well supported in their denial of racism by cultural narratives that maintain the myths of meritocracy and the American Dream. Rugged individualism and work ethic become key factors in understanding themselves and the world(s) around them. Racial inequality is explained away by white students who justify racism through the suggestion that “some people” (read here: people of color) “just don't work hard enough.” Arguments about “some people” allow whites to suppress any psychic dissonance they may experience when they may momentarily recognize the reality of white supremacy. White students cling to an understanding of themselves as “color blind,” as distinct individuals immune to the social forces that encourage racist world views. Riding on a comfortable cushion of apathy,

white students find multiple ways to deny their unearned, superior position at the top of the hierarchy of skin color privilege in contemporary United States society. White students ignore their own privilege, remain unaware of their racist attitudes, and instead feel satisfied with themselves as kind, polite, egalitarian, and caring people. Indeed, white supremacy encourages this type of complacency, for recognizing whiteness means coming to recognize the ways that those of us who are white benefit daily in a racist world. Unknowingly and unintentionally, for that is how whiteness maintains itself best, many of my white students reify racism as they deny it, reconstituting white supremacist ideology in the classroom and beyond.

The following chapter considers how white teachers further reinforce racism and white supremacy with each other and in their classrooms. Similar to our students, even when we have the best of intentions, we manage to maintain our own comfortable affective dispositions that ignore the ways in which we perpetuate the whiteness that keeps racist social structures intact in the United States of America.

Chapter Three: White Teachers Reify White Privilege in the Classroom and Beyond

White teachers have the responsibility of confronting their individual participation in the social construction of white privilege structures in the classroom and in the profession. It is imperative that those of us who are white learn to recognize, critique, and ultimately change the many ways that we engage in the subtle social dynamics of everyday, often unintentional, racism. Identifying racist attitudes and behaviors and the affective dimensions related to them means thinking critically about the ways that whites knowingly and unknowingly enact white supremacy at various sites in their everyday lives. White people constitute and reconstitute whiteness in and through our thoughts, our conversations, and our everyday decisions. Feminist educational theorist Ursula Kelly discusses the necessity of reflecting on the ways that teachers, specifically, must engage in critical self reflection:

[i]t is at the intersection of the psychic and the social that the parameters for any education project are constructed. In this respect, an underscoring of the importance of teacher self-analysis constitutes more than a theoretical point: it becomes an ethical challenge. (Kelly 154)

Engaging in self-reflexivity is an ethical challenge for white teachers who have the privilege of remaining oblivious to their skin color privilege. However, by thinking more critically about how we live and about what we are teaching and learning, we can be more cognizant of the reality that we profit from our

whiteness on a daily basis. As I discussed in chapter one, due to its careful self-silencing, whiteness is made invisible. It is difficult for white people to realize that they profit from whiteness, and it is also painful to know that what we do supports discrimination against others.⁴⁵ However, it is only by making this knowledge a part of our everyday consciousness that white teachers will find ways to integrate anti-racist work into our pedagogies.

In this chapter I continue my investigation of whiteness by turning my attention to white teachers and the ways that we continually and often unknowingly reinforce white supremacy in the classroom and in the profession. I have identified four features of whiteness that white teachers often perpetuate. First, I discuss what whiteness studies scholars have termed “white talk” and “race talk.” Both occur in everyday conversations white people have, and both serve to inculcate white supremacy.⁴⁶ After providing examples of white talk and race talk in actual conversations, I use the examples to reveal “languages of whiteness” that are “spoken” by white teachers of writing. These languages—both verbal and nonverbal, spoken in the classroom and outside of it, in professional forums and in everyday collegial discussions—disclose the negative perceptions white teachers often have of students of color. For example, languages of whiteness often reveal the lower expectations white teachers have for their students who are not white.

The second identifiable feature of whiteness I examine is the largely uniform adherence white teachers have to teaching standardized written English, as well as evaluating student writing in accordance with its rules. This adherence,

I believe, is not attributable merely to curricular edicts. There are in many cases affective motivations for white teachers' steadfast and stubborn adherence to a notion of standardized English even though it reifies a classed and raced standard in the profession, in our classrooms, and thus in society at large.

The third feature of whiteness I discuss is the seemingly consistent choice white teachers make to not use anti-racist pedagogies in their classrooms. In this section I examine published articles in the field's prominent journals that reveal white teachers' discomfort with enacting anti-racist pedagogies. In terms of affect, the tendency to avoid anti-racist pedagogies reveals a number of things, including white teachers' need to possess a sense of professional competence and solidarity with their colleagues. Ultimately, "turning our backs" on anti-racist work reveals white defensiveness and feelings of anxiety, insecurity, shame, and guilt surrounding white privilege and the teaching of writing in contemporary United States society.

The fourth and final feature of whiteness that I examine is related to the third. Everyday classroom interactions and activities white teachers use often perpetuate white supremacy in the writing classroom. Specifically, I examine the ways that white teachers enact whiteness through discussion techniques and seemingly benign classroom activities such as conducting group work and reading off their students' names while taking attendance.

Perpetuating White Supremacy through “White Talk”

As a white woman with middle class status, I am privy to the constant, everyday languages of whiteness that get perpetuated through seemingly subtle and benign “small-talk.” When we are together, white people see reflections of themselves in me and feel comfortable expressing, whether consciously or not, their *discomfort* about racial and ethnic difference. Similar to making excuses when they tell and laugh at racist jokes, white people almost always fail to realize the implications of making what they perceive as harmless comments about race and ethnicity. “Good-hearted” people who make racist comments that seem to them like nothing more than “simple observations” do a lot to maintain race supremacy, as a scenario I describe later on illustrates. Often, without ever acknowledging the subject of race and ethnicity, well-meaning whites perpetuate white supremacy. Research in communication has taught us that we mean so much more than what we say. In other words, we impart meanings above and beyond what we actually state in words. More often than not, whites are unaware of the subtext of our conversations, of what we are “really” saying about race and our own racial dominance.

White people profit both affectively and materially by not being tuned in to the “extra” or excess languages of whiteness we speak when we engage in everyday conversations. If we examine these conversations critically, we can identify a barrage of messages that bespeak languages of whiteness. White people maintain white supremacy “passively,” whether it be with strangers, family

members, friends, or other white colleagues. I believe that, for many whites, there is often a vague dis-ease that accompanies living as the dominant race and coming into contact with the racialized Other. I read this dis-ease as one of the dominant affective dispositions of whiteness. A recent experience I had at an airport illustrates well white people's discomfort with racial and ethnic difference.

I had arrived at Chicago O'Hare early for a flight back to my hometown of Tampa. Sitting in a long row of black vinyl chairs facing another row of chairs at the airplane gate, I was waiting for my boarding call and plunking away at the keyboard on my laptop. I paused momentarily, looked up, and made eye contact with a wrinkled white woman sitting directly across from me. She had graying hair dyed blond and was smiling at me pleasantly over a pair of attractive, silver, wire-rimmed glasses. Only a short distance separated us; our knees weren't more than a foot away from each other as we squeezed into the small, tightly spaced, interlocked airport chairs. I returned to my work but when I looked up again our eyes met briefly and we smiled at one another.

"Going to Tampa? Heading home?" I asked. She nodded her head in what appeared to be relief.

"Yes," she breathed. "I'll be glad to get back."

"Me too," I replied. "It's always good to get home." I had just spent too many days away from home myself and I missed my dog and my friends and my own bed. Because I am as much of a "smiler" and "small-talker" as most mid-

westerners are, I continued briefly in our pleasantries. The woman told me that she had been in Chicago visiting her sister whom she hadn't seen in seven or eight years.

"I bet that was wonderful," I returned.

"Oh yes," she responded. "My niece took some time off work and . . ."

We continued for another minute or so. I filled her in on my superfluous details—time spent with goddaughters, a Madonna concert, a quick trip to Iowa for a family reunion. I returned to my work again and she to a puzzle book. Perhaps five minutes later we exchanged a few more pleasantries, something about how exciting the city of Chicago is. Her sister lived in a suburb, about an hour from the airport.

"I've never seen so many Mexicans," she said in an almost off-the-cuff manner as she described the location of her sister's neighborhood. Beneath her comment ran a quiet current of tension, as though she hadn't been comfortable with the non-white Others in the Chicago suburb. Our exchange happened quickly; after she spoke I my looked back down at my laptop, a pleasant half smile still frozen to my face. I continued to avoid direct eye contact as she developed her observations.

"Of course, in Tampa we have all the Cubans" Her remarks were almost, but not quite, in passing, almost, but not quite, a mental cataloging of the ethnic composition of the two environments. The woman expressed no overt

anger or disgust, but I read her to be saying that the Mexicans and the Cubans were a hindrance, a negative in her otherwise positive visit to the Chicago suburb.

What made her off-the-cuff comments to me—a complete stranger—possible was, among other things, the (most probably) Euro-American and class identity that we shared. Beyond sharing the same skin color, both of us had the money to fly and the money to bleach our hair blond, and both of us represented a sort of comfortable sameness to the other. Her comments and my lack of any anti-racist response allowed white supremacy to remain intact. I think that “pleasantries” allow people to connect and cope with their surroundings; white supremacy seems to be maintained in the same way. “Languages of whiteness” are typically spoken without any recognition or intention of racism. An insidious form of whiteness, small-talk—like the brief conversation the woman at the airport and I had that day—supports white people in silent, usually unconsidered judgments (feeling and thinking) about the world around us. Similar to whispering the word “black,” the woman at the airport seemed to feel a comfortable sense of release, and perhaps she felt supported by me as she discussed the Mexicans and Cubans with another privileged white woman.

Co-editor of *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, Ashley Woody Doane discusses the silenced nature of whiteness. Doane might recognize this “tale from the airport” as a telling example of one important characteristic of whiteness: its transparency. For the woman at the airport,

whiteness was and is the normal and natural “center”; the Mexicans and Cubans represented a discomfiting departure from it. As whiteness studies scholar Ashley Doane explains it,

a core element in the transparency of ‘whiteness’ and the reproduction of white hegemony is what could be termed the ‘normalization’ . . . of whiteness. The combination of existing domination with transparency enables ‘whiteness’ to be cast but not named—as the larger society, the cultural mainstream. (12)

The white people in the Chicago suburb were not named by race or ethnicity. Instead, Mexicans and Cubans, the racialized “Others,” were marked because of their difference from the white norm. Doane asserts that “white people are less likely to feel socially and culturally ‘different’ in their everyday experiences. . . . Given that what passes as the normative center is often unnoticed or taken for granted, whites often feel a sense of culturelessness and racelessness” (7). That sense of racelessness is bound to be interrupted by racial and ethnic difference. The “airport woman” certainly was not considering her own race or ethnicity; instead the Mexicans and Cubans—visibly and culturally different from her—were the spectacle. Their mere non-white presence was unsettling, probably irritating, although she never said anything of the kind directly to me.

Alice McIntyre has coined the term “white talk” to identify “talk that serves to insulate white people from their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (31). White people are highly skilled at what McIntyre

terms “falling victim to the seduction of similarity.” Under this sense of belonging, whites talk to each other about race “uncritically” (45). “Hiding under the canopy of camaraderie,” the airport woman and I spoke a language of white normativity without ever discussing race *per se* (47).

Although the airport woman made the comments, I also engaged in a couple of the aspects of white talk that McIntyre names. First, I remained silent when the woman made the racialized, isolationist comments. I made space for her language act and allowed her remarks to go unchallenged, thereby validating our white supremacy. True to a culture of niceness, it really was not “polite” to challenge this woman, a person I barely knew. By not interrupting her racist speech, I allowed whiteness to flow in and through us. I maintained white normativity with my silence. In addition to remaining quiet (and even smiling!), both my silence and my pleasant facial expression supported the culture of uncritical “niceness” (McIntyre 46). In effect, I validated what the airport woman said (and also said without saying) about ethnic difference. In a matter of seconds I colluded in racism. Disguised as “small talk,” the languages of whiteness were well spoken at that time and place in the airport terminal. Indeed, fleeting and common conversations such as the one I just described have tremendous force in the maintenance of white supremacy.

Prominent scholarship in critical whiteness studies makes similar observations about conversations among whites that maintain racism. Sociologist Kristin Myers has conducted fascinating empirical research into “casual, private

conversations” among whites that “demean people of color while simultaneously insulating and celebrating white privilege” (130). Myers suggests that “racetalk is a mundane yet pernicious enactment of white supremacy” (130).⁴⁷ Myers agrees with the assertion made by anti-violence activist and diversity educator Paul Kivel, who states in *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Social Justice* that “racism affects each and every aspect of [white people’s] lives, all the time, whether people of color are present or not” (qtd. in Myers 130). “Racetalk,” or “white talk” is so “pernicious” and insidious precisely because of its “mundane,” everyday qualities (Myers 130). Myers also refers to Teun van Dijk, a researcher of race and discourse analysis, who explains that racist discourse is a “surface structure” that is “viable” because it relies on an entire system of social structures that keep white supremacy intact (qtd. in Myers 130). Examining seemingly simple or subtle conversations such as my conversation with the airport woman is one method that helps to identify and critique the whiteness that “takes place at the micro level of [everyday] social practices” and facilitates the “enactment and reproduction” of racism (van Dijk 93).

White talk supports an affective dimension of white normativity that Myers has named “white fright”: the perception that whites are losing their power position to minorities (129). A defensive reaction, white fright is documented by Myers through her analysis of “white talk” among college students, professors, police officers, and strangers who were observed secretly over a period of one year. One key feature of white fright and the racetalk that supports it involves “categorization and surveillance.” With categorization, white people can

stereotype people of color, placing them into “tidy, toxic dehumanizing boxes” (Myers 136). Similarly, the woman at the airport lumped together all Mexicans and Cubans in the respective towns of Chicago and Tampa. Once they have lumped people of color into stereotypical and thus less threatening categories, white people engage in the second aspect of racetalk that Myers identifies: “surveillance” (137). With the tool of surveillance, “whites police their borders— . . . through racetalk—in order to ‘reclaim their waning dominance’” (137). It seemed that the woman at the airport was certainly experiencing Myers’ notion of “white fright.” By policing her surroundings through comments about the Mexicans and Cubans, she reassured herself of her white insularity and engaged in what Myers labels a “categorization” of non-white Others that relegates them to inferior positions.

My conversation with the woman at the airport was similar to the white “teacher” talk I discussed in chapter one in which the young teacher preparing to teach for the first time stereotyped people of color by discussing her concerns about her black students and “how *they* write.” White teacher talk might be read as in line with Robert Brooke’s concept of “underlife,” which draws on sociologist Irving Goffman’s definition of various behaviors that help people to support a positive sense of self in the face of uneven power structures. In the classroom and in their professional interactions, many white teachers of writing engage (albeit often unknowingly) in a conspiratorial maintenance of what they see as a threat to their white superiority. White teacher “underlife conversations” are an

integral part of our everyday, professional *modus operandi*, perhaps especially for those of us who are teachers of writing.

For example, when I told one teacher-friend that I was researching the ways that teachers reify white supremacy in the classroom, she immediately exclaimed, “You should come to my classroom and see what I do. I use every derogatory term in the book. No one gets off easy. I say it all: niggers, spics, wetbacks”

My teacher-friend explained that her point in using the slurs was to diminish the power of language: if we give language power, it holds power over us. While I think that discussions of language and power are vital, I question what seemed to me to be a lack of awareness about the various issues surrounding her approach, or at least what seemed like a lack of awareness as she expressed it to me. There are multiple implications of a white teacher uttering white supremacist language in the classroom. And the fact that there are no equivalent derogatory terms for white people is an important point that must also be discussed. The word “honky” just does not have the social power that other racist epithets do. I have not visited my colleague’s classroom, so I am sure I am making some assumptions about her approach. In some ways, even as I write this I feel an urge to question my reading of my teacher-friend’s comments and to not “betray” what I interpret as her lack of self-reflexivity and consideration of the immense white dominant power structure reified by her language choices. My cautionary response is a white supremacist one, further indication of the power of

white normativity that assures that white folks “perform properly” in a “culture of niceness.”

Unfortunately, more often than not, I hear white teachers jump to a defensive, non-self-reflexive stance when I discuss my research. This is a telling revelation of the persistent power of whiteness that works to keep white people oblivious to their privilege. I regularly encounter white teachers who are taken aback or just do not quite understand the concept of an examination of white supremacy in white teachers’ behaviors. Similar to my white students who suggest that racism is “out there” and belongs only to the domain of cross-burners, many white teachers seem to cling to the fact that they are educators and thus distant from the ignorance often associated with racism. Teachers are not ignorant, so they cannot be racist, right? It is much less stressful and anxiety provoking to remain in denial than to challenge ourselves and the subtle, complicitous, and often insidious ways we reinforce whiteness.

When I told one white woman teacher that I was researching “whiteness,” she engaged in white talk with me by immediately making a connection to an experience a female friend of hers was having. Both women are white and had been teaching part-time at a historically black college. My colleague’s friend was being questioned, unfairly, in her estimation, by students and administrators about behaviors they felt were racist; somehow my colleague’s first reaction upon learning about my research was that it must be about helping white teachers who get falsely charged with racism. Unfortunately, this colleague is not the only one

who has incorrectly assumed that my research seeks to uncover why white people get falsely accused of racism.⁴⁸ Their responses serve as further evidence of the defensiveness that inevitably accompanies a white supremacist social structure.

Another conversation with a colleague of mine provides further evidence of white talk and the seemingly common inability to not understand my research into whiteness and the teaching of writing. After discussing my project with my colleague, he told me, “But what does all that have to do with the teaching of writing?” “All that” is, of course, the reality of whiteness in our classrooms and in our professional lives, and dismissing “all that” as an issue separate from language and the social construction of thought reveals white talk’s power to mask white supremacy and its relationship to the world of education.

It is important to listen carefully to, for lack of a better term, the “water cooler” conversations among white teachers of writing. In order to bring about anti-racist change, white teachers must engage in self-reflection and increase our awareness of white teacher talk in our professional environments. We must identify the presence and frequency of the vague, racist references endemic to whiteness that we make and/or support through our silence. Indeed, how often do we propagate our white supremacy as I did (and sometimes still do) when I leave racist “small talk” unchallenged?⁴⁹ There is no question that the “culture of politeness” fuels the whiteness reigning in white people’s everyday interactions. Before the committee meeting starts, after a particularly exciting or frustrating

classroom event, in the hallways, by the mailboxes, on our listservs, and in other brief and seemingly unimportant exchanges, we engage in lethal “teacher talk” that establishes an ethos of white supremacy among teachers of writing.

My white colleague who said “You know how they write” in reference to African American students was reaching out to me to support her in her fear of the Other. She was looking for someone who looked like her to collude and comfort her in deep-seated anxieties and prejudices. By categorizing people of color and engaging in fleeting “white talk,” this teacher spoke a language of whiteness that supported racism and the white supremacist norm. I had only met her a time or two. The brief conversation we had was our first conversation alone; we were standing up in my tiny little graduate student office that I shared with two other teachers. In an effort to not make waves with my new colleague (an affective dimension I’ll discuss more later in this chapter), I colluded with her in white talk that day just as I did at the airport. I maintained the all-too-familiar comfort zone of the “culture of niceness” by changing the subject and moving on to more “polite” topics of conversation.

Rule Bound: Lowering Expectations and Supporting White Supremacy by Valorizing Standardized English

Heavily invested in the American culture machine’s myths of the American Dream, in the United States as a meritocracy, in individualism, and in “color-

blindness,” I hear white teachers all around me claim vehemently that they treat all their students the same, regardless of their racial (or classed, or gendered) identities.⁵⁰ Christine Sleeter and Alice McIntyre have observed this behavior first-hand through their research. Both Sleeter and McIntyre have spent considerable time studying groups of white teachers to learn more about their orientations toward race. *Overwhelmingly*, even though they claimed to view and treat all students equally, white teachers these researchers worked with clung to the myths and tended to associate racial and ethnic minorities with poverty, lack of motivation, and dysfunctional families (Sleeter 162). The truth is that in line with white supremacist culture, white teachers tend to have lower expectations of students, especially student writers who are racial and ethnic minorities.

Despite their lowered expectations of non-white students, these teachers cling to the condescending belief that *even* their underprivileged, non-white students can “make it to the top” if they just work hard enough (Sleeter 161). This clinging to the myth that we live in a meritocracy lets them ignore their own privilege (usually white privilege) and believe that it was simply their hard work that made them fluent in standardized English and got them to where they are today. That belief in “hard work” allows them to remain in an almost blissful complacency with the white supremacist status quo. Denying the reality of white normativity, they want to believe that any one of their students has an equal opportunity to succeed.

White supremacist ideology and the myth of meritocracy are incredibly successful in making dominant social structures invisible. Whiteness disguises the realm of the political by displacing responsibility for inequity onto individual people. When white teachers are able to recognize the reality of social inequities that put some students at an advantage over others, they often echo what white students say: “Okay, well, so maybe there is skin color privilege in the educational system. Then that is the way that it is; it is too bad that the system is this way, but that does not mean that kids can’t rise up out of it.” This statement gets closely followed by something like this: “It’s really all about work ethic. This is America, and people who work hard can rise above discrimination.” The burden is placed on those who are discriminated against, and we rely as always on the magic of “hard work” to support our beliefs that students of color will be able to “succeed” eventually.

“Eventually” is the key here. The idea that those who are disadvantaged “just have to work harder” hints at the orientations white teachers often have toward their students. Even teachers with the best intentions reinforce racism when they see students of color and automatically assume they will have to “work harder” than white students to improve their writing skills. Closely associated with this presumption is the belief that these students are in fact deficient in some way.

“White talk” is also quite prevalent among white teachers when it comes to discussing standardized English.⁵¹ Sadly, I think the majority of white teachers

of English today reify white dominance through an almost religious fervor for standardized English and those who are trained in it. Clearly, standardized English does not “belong” to white people; however, as one rhetoric and compositionist interested in African American discourse(s) and the teaching of writing observes, educationally privileged whites are the ones usually trained from a young age both at home and in school in the “marketplace dialect” of standardized English (Holmes 59). People who do not always communicate in standardized English and who are fluent in other language systems such as African American Vernacular Expression (AAVE) bear the brunt of the discrimination. Of course, regional differences and socioeconomic status also play a role in students’ fluency in standardized English. Students who speak Southern dialects, for example, may not write in standardized English and are thus often judged by educators as intellectually inferior. Standardized English tends to be taught to and is used most frequently by socio-economically privileged people. Any student whose first or “home” discourse is not standardized English is subject to discrimination by writing teachers.

Take, for example, well-known compositionist Maxine Hairston when she discusses dominant ideology and standardized English. Hairston states that students who do not speak and write fluently in standardized English do not “write clearly” (“Diversity” 122). Hairston ignores the power and privilege structures that uphold standardized English as the best and “clearest” English. Hairston wrote an article earlier in her career in response to CCCC’s Students’ Right to Their Own Language resolution. In this piece, Hairston defines

standardized English as “coherent” and “good” (“Not All” 12). In her research for the article, Hairston compiled a survey that questioned mostly white-collar professionals about their tolerance for “errors.” The strongest negative responses were to “errors that were so glaring they might be called status markers” (“Not All” 15). Not surprisingly, the “errors” were for the most part sentences written in non-standardized English (e.g., “Jones don’t think it’s acceptable;” “When we was in the planning stages”).

Some twenty years since the publication of Hairston’s article about “error,” the lack of tolerance for non-Standardized English is still alive and well. What is more, the intolerance is often accompanied by an air of superiority. Last spring, a white woman writing teacher sent a racially coded and mocking email about “A Rapper’s Guide to Grammar” to our English department’s graduate student listserv. Unfortunately, she no longer has the posting or the source, so I cannot reproduce it here. Though intended as a joke, the email—which was obviously discriminatory against students who use non-standardized English—was also racially coded by its reference to rap music. The only response to the “Rapper’s Guide” was posted by a white woman who shot the list a brief email thanking the other one for the “comic relief” that is necessary when “dealing” with first-year writers. The white supremacist “culture of politeness” was reinforced when no one, including myself, took either responder to task for the racist posting.

A critical indicator of the power of white privilege is the standard-setting function that white teachers of writing perform not just in relation to standardized

English, but also in terms of curricula. Overwhelmingly in the majority, white middle and upper class teachers of writing often exhibit an affective disposition toward their work that relies on a nostalgic “wish for a homogenous past” (Fox 2). This “homogenous past” is linked directly to a lack of educational access for speakers of AAVE; students with standardized English language privilege are the ones associated with this mythical, “homogenous past” because they communicate in a shared conventional language. In an attempt to deny their racial privilege, many white teachers today remark that “kids today” have just “gone to hell.” I appreciate Gilyard’s take on this nostalgia: “What about the golden age of American education when all was fine? Forget it. It never happened,” he writes (*Let’s* 86). White teachers of writing remember “back in the day,” when educators did not question the power dynamics and discrimination associated with standardized English, “back in the day” when things were *Leave it to Beaveresque*—whitewashed.

Rather than learning the rules of language systems different from standardized English and learning to integrate discussions of language and power into their curricula, many privileged white teachers are comfortable in their judgment of non-standardized English as “uneducated” and thus inferior. White teachers trained in standardized English view students as inadequate, or, conversely, with condescending pity—as problem children (no matter what their age) who need to be “fixed.” And inferiority needs to be fixed, right? After all, isn’t that what teachers do? We “fix” problems. No doubt, white teachers can maintain a sense of power and control by understanding non-standardized English usage

as a “problem” that must be rectified. Gilyard also notes the consistent appearance of this attitude among teachers of writing today. In one university workshop, Gilyard states, “several writing instructors told me quite forcefully that part of their responsibility is to *correct* the speech of students” (*Let’s* 19 emphasis added). Teachers perpetuate white domination and the restrictive “banking model” of education described by Freire when they remain in “intellectual comfort zones” that allow us to define our jobs as imparting to our students the “right” answers and the “skills” necessary to communicate in standardized English (Gilyard, *Let’s* 19).

Gilyard recognizes that standardized English is indeed the language of power and commerce, and we do need to help students learn to wield it when appropriate. However, Gilyard’s suggestion that many writing teachers remain in “intellectual comfort zones” about this issue is on the mark. Of course, these “zones” are not only intellectual, they are also (and I do not think Gilyard would disagree) distinct affective spaces. Remember, for example, the young, first-time college writing teacher who expressed to me her dis-ease about the number of black students in her classroom. “You know how *they* write,” she said to me in the privacy of my office with a facial expression that revealed nervousness. Many white teachers experience a genuine sense of anxiety at having to learn how to teach students who are not fluent in standardized English.

In truth, many, if not most, white teachers of writing grew up speaking and writing standardized English, and they literally do not know how to work with

students not fluent in the language. Important affective dimensions surrounding standardized English and whiteness, then, are not just condescending attitudes. Anxiety and fear are affective aspects of their attitudes as well. I would argue that the vast majority of white writing teachers do not consider the implications behind labeling “their” English as “the standard.” Identifying standard English as standardized is one way to use the power of language to reflect the reality that there are *people* behind language, and what they do to and with language affects us all. The people with the most social power—white people—are the ones who can *standardize* language, and their discourse is put forth consistently as the standard by which all others should be judged. I do not argue against language standards *per se* in this dissertation, because like many others I believe that an agreed upon system of communication is helpful and necessary for success in today’s culture.⁵² However, I do argue against how many teachers make sense of the issue of standardized English. Unaware of (and sometimes opposed to) the CCCC’s Students’ Right to Their Own Language Resolution, teachers of writing reify whiteness every day as they reinforce with each other and their students the notion that standardized English is intellectually superior.⁵³

The implications of this white supremacy do not just boost whites’ morale and privileged social status, of course. Students not fluent in standardized English reap fewer material rewards. They have less success in school, on placement exams, and in securing employment. They have “deficiencies” in conversing in the white-standardized language of commerce both in and beyond academia. Gilyard and Geneva Smitherman, among others, have done much to

document the devastating nature that the white superiority complex about standardized English has on people of color. Students who are not fluent in standardized English pay a high price in terms their self-esteem, sense of identity, and material opportunities. Teachers of writing who view students as inferior based on their lack of experience with or their decision not to use standardized English support the racist and classist status quo. At the “identity-eradicating imperatives of [these] masters and overseers” speakers not fluent in standardized English are required to commit what Gilyard terms “genopsycholinguisticide” in the current United States educational system (*Let’s* 34). As they straddle the line between using non-standardized English home discourses and standardized English, they cannot help but be left to “foot the psychic bill” (Gilyard, *Voices* 70).

Struggling Over Politics in the Writing Classroom: White Teachers and the Refusal to Enact Anti-Racist Pedagogies

Most of us are familiar with continuing debates among teachers of writing over the place of politics in our classrooms. Two decades ago Hairston published her now infamous “The Winds of Change” in which she traces and argues against the paradigm shift or “social turn” in the teaching of writing. Her more recent “Diversity, Ideology, and the Teaching of Writing” argues against what she perceives as the inordinate number of “leftist” teachers who want to force their

ideology down their students' throats. In actuality, Hairston's article demonstrates what I consider to be the real dominant ideology in the field that is forced down students' throats: the idea that the classroom "is not a place for politics" (i.e., a forum for examining race, class, and gender dynamics in contemporary United States society). Hairston's later article is only a decade old, but it makes similar claims to those in her earlier piece. The arguments Hairston makes against leftist teaching are still being made today. In fact, I contend that the vast majority of white teachers of writing have negative attitudes toward critical pedagogy. Take, for example, the comments that writing teacher Bob Fecho received when he told a colleague recently about a critical assignment he and his students were working on. His students were studying racial tensions between an orthodox Jewish sect and African and Caribbean Americans in the Crown Heights section of the Bronx. "Why are you doing this?" his colleague asked. "Are you looking for extremism? You're just going to stir up a lot of Anti-Semitic talk," she explained before walking out of his office (Fecho 9).

The overwhelming tendency of white teachers to choose not to enact anti-racist pedagogy reflects a desire to steer clear of the reality of white normativity and to negotiate feelings such as self esteem, pride, comfort, safety, security, fear, and denial.⁵⁴ Similar to the responses of white students, one quite common response of white teachers is to deny that racism is a reality in society, let alone in their classrooms.

McIntyre found as much when she worked with a group of young, middle-to-upper class white women who were in their final year of study and preparing to graduate and begin teaching careers. Virtually all of the teachers she worked with avoided discussing race at all costs. Often, when McIntyre steered discussions toward the soon-to-be teachers' racial privilege, the women changed the subject by offering more affectively "pleasant" narratives which ignored racist realities in favor of happy "success" stories of racial minorities (McIntyre 60).

In "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," Hairston refers to a colleague who said that "the mission of English departments is always to oppose the dominant culture" (123). Hairston suggests that "For those who agree, how natural to turn to the freshman writing courses. With a huge captive enrollment of largely unsophisticated students, what a fertile field to cultivate to bring about political and social change" (123). Throughout the article Hairston stresses the necessity of maintaining integrity among teachers of writing in particular, and in our profession, in general. To me, Hairston's act of labeling first-year students as "unsophisticated" underestimates students.

While I do not doubt that Hairston cares about her job and sincerely wants to do what she says ("build students' confidence and competence as writers"), I think that her statement reflects the intellectual polarities that, as teachers, we sometimes tend to establish between ourselves and our students ("Diversity" 117). These polarities are symptomatic of the top-down, elitist approach encouraged in traditional educational systems dominated by white privilege. Notice Hairston's reaction to the notion of critical pedagogies:

As writing teachers, we should stay within our area of professional expertise. . . . We have no business getting into areas where we may have passion and conviction but no scholarly base from which to operate. When classes focus on complex issues such as racial discrimination, economic injustices, and inequities of class and gender, they should be taught by qualified faculty who have the depth of information and historical competence that such critical social issues warrant. (“Diversity” 125)

I submit that Hairston and the majority of white teachers of writing feel as though enacting anti-racist pedagogy is beyond their realm of “professional expertise.” White teachers often respond in the negative when asked if they teach about race and race privilege in their classrooms, claiming they do not have the proper training. Often they say they are “not qualified” to teach students about “these issues”; they do not have “mastery” of the subject matter. Notice this impulse in Hairston’s comments: “Multicultural issues are too complex and diverse to be dealt with fully and responsibly in an English course” (“Diversity” 129). Hairston and the numerous writing teachers who agree with her do not seem to realize that it is *irresponsible* not to engage in anti-racist teaching.

Hairston’s comments indicate the same sorts of affective dispositions that many white teachers express when the subject of anti-racist pedagogies arises. Even though they do not say it, white teachers of writing seem to feel overwhelmed, as though they can’t “manage” dealing with the reality of white

supremacy themselves, let alone the discomfort that inevitably arises when they discuss it in their classrooms.

I do not want to discount that thinking and teaching about race and racism often invokes affective responses that seem too uncomfortable or overwhelming for white teachers to handle. It is much easier to choose not to think (and thus not to *feel*) about racism; the invisibility of white privilege supports teachers in their decisions to shy away from the reality of racism in their lives and thus in their classrooms, and by keeping issues of white privilege far, far away from their curricula, white teachers maintain that privilege.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most white teachers do not discuss race and race privilege in their classrooms. After all, they are heavily invested in the invisibility of whiteness. Making it visible reveals the unearned nature of advantage, which, in turn, can lead to a loss of power. But the truth is that privilege is already quite visible in this system where working toward anti-racist education is a *choice* made by those with the power (usually whites) to institute it.

Hairston's response to the field's social turn mirrors the discomfort most white writing teachers seem to have with enacting anti-racist pedagogies. A close look at the language in her article "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing" reveals the discomfort she feels:

I fear that we are in real danger of being co-opted by the radical left, coerced into acquiescing to methods that we abhor because, in the abstract, we have some mutual goals. Some faculty may also

fear being labeled “right wing” if they oppose programs that are represented as being “liberating.” But we shouldn’t be duped

(Hairston, “Diversity” 126)

Hairston uses the word “fear” twice in the above quotation. In the same paragraph she uses the word “battle” to characterize the struggles we engage in over the validity of critical pedagogy. Moreover, she states that “cultural leftists” are “happy to stir up liberal guilt” Perhaps it is white teachers of writing who feel afraid and guilty. The question is, of what? I do not think for a minute that critical pedagogues are “happy” about “stirring up guilt.” Indeed, those of us who recognize that we profit from oppression do and should feel a sense of guilt for the unearned advantage we receive every day. Instead of acknowledging our white privilege and the validity of critical pedagogy, we cling to what feels most comfortable: a status-quo, non-confrontational pedagogy that valorizes supposedly safe spaces at the expense of confrontational learning. Beyond avoiding uncomfortable moments in the classroom, many white teachers avoid acknowledging white privilege as a way of maintaining their own security, self-esteem, and sense of pride in their work. Steering clear of the issue of critical literacy and white privilege—clinging to the subject matter we have learned and continue to teach—allows for feelings of safety and confidence in ourselves as students, as teachers, and as people.

Ignoring white privilege takes a variety of forms in terms of what teachers choose to teach. In literature, we may adhere to the traditional canon and

effectively ignore its privileging of white, male writers. Given a general lack of exposure to writers *outside* the traditional canon, it makes sense that many teachers' comfort levels will be much higher with material they have studied already. Increased comfort with the material leads to an increased sense of competence and control. Year after year, as teachers of English continue to make the choice to include in their curricula only the "dead white guys (and, to a lesser extent, white gals)," they limit and control their own and their students' knowledge of works written by those not privileged in the white supremacist power structure. This control enables the continual reinforcement in the belief that what they teach is sufficient and good. There is no room for insecurity in this approach; the "greats" that white teachers know *must* be good, right? Otherwise, why were the "greats" the only ones that they themselves had learned about? By extension, white teachers also avoid worrying about where they might be lacking in their teaching; sticking with what they have learned buoys their positive sense of professional identity. Avoiding the issue of critical literacy and white privilege in their classrooms, clinging to the subject matter they have learned and continue to teach, may very well be a way to hold on to feelings of safety and confidence in themselves as teachers and as people.

Notice the ways that Hairston's comments, like those made by most white writing teachers, maintain a confident veneer and flattened affective state. Hairston states that writing teachers "may have passion and conviction," but right in line with the white, elitist, patriarchal mind-body split, educators have no business teaching with or about it. Life experience and passion are divorced from

the sanitized classroom and “professional expertise.” Again a symptom of hierarchical whiteness, knowledge is confined to a “scholarly base” that has been created and promulgated in a white (male, classist) supremacist system.

Teaching against white supremacy involves much more than “knowledge and historical competence”; hiding behind scientific, rationalist, Enlightenment myths about “scholarly bases” makes it possible for white educators to continue to turn their backs on anti-racist pedagogies and their colleagues who adopt them.

In addition to maintaining comfort, professional pride, and self-esteem, avoiding anti-racist curricula helps white educators to maintain solidarity with the majority of teachers who reject critical pedagogies. Given the increasingly conservative university climate, adopting a critical pedagogical approach is a move that is more likely to gain enemies than respect and support. Political struggles between rhetoric and composition faculty and literature faculty are well known. When white teachers of writing teach against the racist status quo, they are at greater personal and professional risk—in the classroom, in the department, in the university, and even in the profession. In addition to disrupting their own comfort zones, white teachers of writing must face and work to overcome the resistance of working with students who are not accustomed to thinking critically about socially silenced issues of race, class, gender, etc. Furthermore, since critical pedagogies are the exception and not the rule, anti-racist teachers are often not supported (and are even denigrated) by their colleagues.

In addition to wanting to avoid castigation and maintain solidarity with their co-workers, white teachers of writing, especially those of us with educational and class privilege, have strong feelings of nostalgia for our own educational, usually “whitewashed,” experiences. There is no question that many teachers are drawn to the field of education because it is a place where we have felt successful in our lives. School is where, from a young age, we sought approval and, with few exceptions, routinely received it from our teachers. In clear terms, we learned what was expected of us, and we performed to reach our goals: to get that A, or that scholarship, or that glowing smile from our favorite instructor. We were taught pride in ourselves and in our capacities to learn. Kelly discusses the affective dimensions of the teachers’ connection to education systems: “achievement was also how I convinced myself I was worthy of love. My achievement could mean that I was not another burden, but a reward” (157). Achieving according to white, class-privileged educational standards is a way for many of us to shore up feelings of security and acceptance. Conversely, acknowledging the white dominance that fuels society and our classroom interferes with the rosy pictures that many white teachers have of our own school experiences—further reason why so many white educators choose not to adopt anti-racist pedagogies in our classrooms.

Teachers argue that classrooms should be “safety zones” where diverse peoples interact and learn from each other’s perspectives. The “safety zone,” however, often morphs into the “anti-critical” zone that papers over white supremacist reality in favor of “polite whiteness,” which, in turn, reinforces the

United States' racist status quo. Along these lines, compositionist Mary Louis Pratt's conceptualization of the writing classroom as a multicultural "contact zone" might be understood as a place driven by "polite" impulses of whiteness that invite controlled "contact" between students. The "contact zone" classroom is a place where people of different cultures, ethnicities, racial identities, etc. meet and learn together. Pratt suggests that "negotiating" (or teaching in) the contact zone is a necessary challenge of multicultural education. In some ways, the contact zone is similar to an unrealistic "safety zone" when it is envisioned as a closed, neutral space independent of the discriminatory dynamics of the outside world.

Stephen Brown has discussed the notion of the "contact zone" at length in his award-winning monograph *Words in the Wilderness*, a fascinating critical ethnography that discusses Brown's experience teaching on an Athabascan Indian Reservation in Alaska. Brown details interactions with his students and colleagues and considers carefully his position as a white, male outsider in a community exploited by opportunistic oil-drilling companies and the government policies that support them. Brown demonstrates that, for some, the contact zone might not symbolize safety but instead be read as a violent war metaphor. For many white teachers who have little experience teaching in diverse classrooms, the contact zone may represent a place where white teachers leave their mostly white worlds and enter the uncomfortable "combat" of the diverse classroom, as Brown did. For example, I have discussed the very real discomfort my young white colleague felt about teaching for the first time and having black students in

her class. This is the dis-ease that leads her and other white teachers to understand the classroom as an unstable “contact zone” where they will be forced to encounter (and teach!) the non-white Other.⁵⁵

In an effort to quiet the common, underlying dis-ease with the “contact zone,” many white teachers still cling to the notion of a “safe” classroom community, where everyone is respectful—and equal. Clinging to myths of color-blindness and the United States as a meritocracy, white teachers want to believe the classroom is hermetically sealed “safety zone,” free from the racism, classism, and sexism that exist outside in “the real world.” As white teachers we want to believe that we can create a space insulated from white supremacy. Teachers want to feel safe, but safety is not a reality in a white supremacist culture. Our classrooms are not free from the oppressive dynamics of United States society. I think that often educators feel as though their classrooms can be freed from these dynamics if they remain un-discussed. Arguments that the classroom can be a “safety zone” are indicative of white people’s obliviousness to the reality of social inequalities that are present every time teachers and students enter the classroom.

Steering clear of anti-racist pedagogy because it is not “safe” is an all-too-common practice that allows white teachers to remain in a false bubble of security. Trained in educational systems which by and large have continued in the tradition of keeping white privilege hidden, teachers who avoid teaching

about race and racism can remain nestled in affective “comfort zones,” the opposite of Pratt’s contact zone as it is explicated by Brown.

In addition to pointing out connections between contact zones and “war” zones, Brown points out that the term “contact zone” also refers to physical “contact,” as in the more violent “contact” sports such as football and hockey. The word “contact” has also been used to denote the oppressive colonial situation; that is, the “violence of the initial ‘contact’ between new world subcultures and their old world colonizers” (Brown 114). Connoting a type of violence, then, the term “contact zone” is, on one hand, an apt descriptor of the critical classroom where teacher and student engage in the challenging and often uncomfortable work of cultivating critical literacy. However, because violence is something we want to avoid—especially in our classrooms—it is no great surprise that most educators cling to false ideals of “safe classrooms” and steer clear of the intense, often unsettling, (sometimes downright violent) feelings associated with investigating issues of white privilege in the classroom.

Hairston states that the arguments of critical pedagogues are “really frightening,” and that they are reminiscent of “re-education camps in totalitarian governments” that “make education always the instrument of the state” (“Diversity” 127). In addition to feeling that critical pedagogies are being forced upon them, many white teachers also deny the presence of white supremacy in their classrooms by clinging to false notions of harmonious diversity. “Diversity” becomes a code word for the racialized Other. Similar to white students who look

around their classrooms and see racial, ethnic, and gender diversity as a sign of the end of racism and sexism, white teachers often claim that students who represent various racial and ethnic groups are concrete evidence of equality in the classroom. Unfortunately, as I mentioned in the introduction to this work, many multicultural educators utilize hooks's "Eating the Other" approach to understanding their classrooms. Playing off the notion of sexual tourism, cultural commodification, or "getting a bit of the Other," hooks defines and illustrates the dangerous narrative of white supremacy that understands itself as diverse and multicultural but is actually parasitic upon non-white cultures.⁵⁶ Many educators see our classrooms as diverse, democratic, and culturally inclusive places.⁵⁷

Non-white students are rich morsels for educative cultural consumption: "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, "Eating" 179). White teachers of writing who choose not to enact ant-racist pedagogies exemplify the dangerous belief about which hooks writes: they believe that experiences with diverse racial and ethnic populations can lead white people to "be changed [for the better] by this convergence of pleasure and Otherness" (hooks, "Eating" 182).

White teachers of writing reveal their lack of faith in critical pedagogies when they miscalculate the abilities and the strengths of self possessed by students whom they often label as unsophisticated. Hairston states that, when faced with the challenge of writing about race, sex, class, etc., students will engage in "fake discourse" that simply parrots the teacher's view:

It is always hard to get students to write seriously and honestly, but when they find themselves in a classroom where they suspect there is a correct way to think, they are likely to take refuge in generalities and responses that please the teacher. Such fake discourse is a kind of silence, the silence we have so often deplored when it is forced on the disadvantaged. (“Diversity” 128)

I disagree that it is difficult to “get students to write seriously” or to “avoid the canned, clichéd prose that neither they nor we take seriously” (“Diversity” 128). In classrooms where we encourage students to investigate their own views in relation to the larger culture by studying the culture around them and the “texts” they embrace and enjoy most, students usually create “serious” discourse. At the very least it will be writing that matters to them, and at the very best it will be writing that can teach them about themselves and the worlds they live in, as well as the various ideologies that live through them. Student writers in critical classrooms can come to richer understandings of themselves and their own investments, privileges, and places for growth.

Their understandings will not come about, however, if they are not challenged to think critically and to interrogate their assumptions and the assumptions of others in their classroom communities. In “The Idea of Community and the Study of Writing,” Joseph Harris provides an important critique of classroom “communities” often championed by teachers who advocate low-risk, “safe” classrooms. Harris reminds us that students come to college holding membership in a variety of diverse communities and that “shiny, happy”

(REM) communities free of the oppressive power dynamics sanctioned by a white supremacist society are an impossibility (“Idea” 273). However, recent work by Harris, most notably his ideas about writing pedagogy, seems to reveal the underlying, internalized fear white teachers have of the “contact zone,” an affective disposition that reflects the unrealistic desire for totally “safe classrooms,” as well as the white supremacist urge to keep quiet about white privilege structures.

Although for many it may seem like sacrilege to place status-quo pedagogues and Joseph Harris in the same camp, I think that even smart, sophisticated teachers such as Harris sometimes reify the white supremacy that informs many debates over pedagogical philosophies. Harris’ July 2003 *College English* opinion piece, “Revision as Critical Practice,” reveals this tendency. I respect very much Harris’ goal of making a case for “a renewed attentiveness to the visible practice of the labor of writing,” and his statements about helping students learn to “claim some real measure of authority as writers in the academy” affirm my belief that Harris does have his students’ best interests at heart (“Revision” 578, 577). However, Harris’ recent article also gives the sense that he, like most others, may not be altogether comfortable directly discussing “broad social forces and discourses” in the classroom (“Revision” 577). Harris asserts that focusing on writing practices diverges in “small yet important ways from recent leftist or critical views of teaching which, following the work of Paulo Freire, aim to reform the consciousness of students” (“Revision” 578). Harris claims that he does not want “to shy away from discussing issues of power or

politics” (“Revision” 583). His approach is to create courses such as the one he taught at the University of Pittsburgh so that issues of power “might well arise,” but *only when the students themselves* make connections between his carefully chosen texts and larger social issues.

This same philosophy is embraced by many teachers who are more open to the tenets of critical pedagogy. “I want to examine issues of social inequality in class, but I don’t want to be the one to bring them up,” they argue (similar to the statement Joseph Harris makes in his opinion piece). Choosing not to make issues of social inequality explicit in their pedagogy might exhibit a genuine fear of forcing their ideology onto their students as many resistant teachers argue that critical pedagogues do. On the other hand, however, perhaps the reluctance to incorporate critical pedagogy reflects a fear of being charged with forcing ideology down our students’ throats. Most of us *do not* want to railroad our students into thinking the same as we do about politics and power, but many of us *do* want to help them come to understand the very real and detrimental dynamics of racism, sexism, classism, etc. in contemporary United States society. However, the majority of us avoid an open acknowledgment of our own politics and an acknowledgment of how those politics influence the texts we have chosen and the syllabi we have constructed. By hoping for or waiting for students to bring up issues considering race, class, gender, etc., we do the very damage we are trying to undo by silencing our perspectives. We perpetrate the lie that the classroom is devoid of political dynamics, that there is no power circulating through it, and that white supremacy is not at work.

Some may argue that, as educators, our perspectives are never really silenced. After all, we represent and hold immense power as the leaders of our classes with the grade books in our hands. No matter how much we work to democratize our teaching, we are still standing between our students and their “credits.” But it seems to me more honest (and thus more educationally sound) to openly acknowledge my politics and my goals in teaching. Yes, I want my students to develop the critical “intellectual practice” Harris and others champion (“Revision” 577). However, I am also very aware that many students will not adopt the same political perspectives that I embrace. As I have become more experienced as a teacher, I have come to understand that students often do not and/or will not adopt my political perspectives. White supremacist ideology leads white educators to overestimate ourselves and underestimate our students when we believe that teachers have the ability to simply force their ideology onto students. From experience, we know that there are students who resist and refuse to engage in the critique that most critical pedagogues value so highly, and others who do engage in critique often end up not agreeing with our views. Megan Boler states quite simply, clearly, and effectively what many of us often forget: “I’m learning to accept that people will not go where they don’t want to go” (“Teaching 123). It is arrogant to assume that they will.

According to Kelly, “Reconciling the struggles and torments of identity are at the heart of a radically reparative pedagogy” (163). It is no wonder so many white teachers avoid adopting anti-racist liberatory pedagogies; if we do, we can be sure of avoiding the self-analysis that comes hand in hand with being honest

about one's pedagogy and thus honest about one's perspectives. Being honest about one's perspectives, then, means reflecting on what we believe and why. Self-reflection, although often empowering, can be and often is psychically draining. Just as it is a lot to ask students to examine themselves and their meaning-making systems, engaging in this work is difficult for white teachers, as well. After all, when it comes to self-reflection, if we are doing it right, we are bound to see things we do not like. Educational theorist Ronald David Glass argues, "The truth of oppression and the power of the dominant ideology in our lives can be humiliating and reinforce a sense of incompetence, fostering even overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame at being thus dominated and controlled by forces beyond us" (30). Sometimes it is hard to look in the mirror in the morning or go to sleep at night when we know what we know about ourselves, especially when we are white teachers who reap enormous benefits from white supremacist social and educational systems.⁵⁸

Everyday Practices in the Cultural Studies Writing Classroom: Reifying White Supremacy with the Basics

Educational theorist Huey Li Li has written on the issue of voice and student participation in the classroom. He argues that a critical and "truly liberating pedagogy must be based on a conjoint effort to listen to the silences [of

those who may not feel empowered to speak] and to reclaim the silenced voices” (Li Li 79). As white teachers, most of the time we are either unaware or we choose not to discuss the racist, sexist, capitalist, heterosexist, patriarchy in which we live. Not just when we talk but also when we remain silent about white supremacy in the classroom, we invoke our institutional authority and belittle those who are continually silenced in a white supremacist society (Li Li 71).

Conversely, white teachers sometimes rely on the “primacy of speech” in the classroom in order to avoid the reality of white supremacy that might come out in class discussions and student writing (Li Li 70). In other words, we change the subject and talk about anything but dominance structures in our white supremacist society. When we constantly “fill in the gap” and do not take the time to listen to silences that can actually educate, we ignore the realities of those students of color who are traditionally silenced in white-dominated education (Li Li 71). Along these same lines, when we covet the primacy of speech, we sometimes rely on what educational theorist Alison Jones calls “the talking cure.” For example, by requiring all of our students to participate in class discussions, sometimes we are actually perpetuating inequalities instead of working against them. The desire for dialogue can signify white teachers’ “dominant group fantasy or romance about access to and unity with the other” (Jones 62). The “desire of the powerful for dialogue,” in other words, the desire to involve all of our students in conversation all of the time, reveals “inchoate desires for redemption and reassurance” (Jones 64). As such, it is important to consider that white teachers might sometimes be engaging more in Myers’ notion of

“surveillance and exploitation” of students or looking for students to assuage our own white guilt, rather than creating opportunities for learning (Jones 65).

In addition to the ways we handle class discussions, requiring our students to engage in group work in class has a variety of effects, and not all of them are positive. In the last few decades, feminist educational theorists have considered, among other things, various methods of “decentering the classroom” so that it ceases to model traditional modes of teaching and learning that emphasize the transmission of teachers’ knowledge to students (a.k.a. Freire’s description of the banking model of education where educators deposit information into their willing students’ otherwise empty brains). Using collaborative learning strategies, or group work, has been one important method of encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning while working with others toward common educational goals. Furthermore, using group work has been credited with creating speaking opportunities for students who are members of those groups traditionally silenced in larger society and thus, by extension, in educational settings.

It is important to note that college classrooms are not pure and distinct microcosms of discriminatory United States culture. They contain only those students with sufficient material resources and other privileges that make a college education possible, or at the very least easier to obtain. However, as I have indicated, in many ways college classes do mirror the inequalities in larger society when it comes time for teachers to assign small group learning activities.

Evelyn Ashton-Jones' linguistic research on group work dynamics convincingly demonstrates that even when we think we are doing our best as critical educators, students engaging in group learning activities often end up reifying traditional power dynamics instead of rupturing them. In her research, Ashton-Jones found that women are interrupted and otherwise silenced as much in small groups as they are in large-group classroom settings—and in society at large. In addition, women tend to adopt stereotypically-gendered communication behaviors that support male members' participation in the groups over their own participation. Women ask questions that encourage men to talk, and they are often relegated to the position of group “secretaries” that serve more administrative functions than leadership functions.

In addition to reifying gender inequalities, small group learning situations also mirror larger social dynamics of white supremacy. For example, consider the following painful situation I saw unfold in a classroom I visited last year. There was one “problem student,” or so I was warned before class, in a small group consisting of three or four traditionally-aged white women and one traditionally-aged black woman. The teacher told me that the black woman had evidently jumped out of her seat and “exploded” in class one day during group work, claiming that her group members would not listen to her. On the day I observed the class, each group was responsible for presenting its final project. I was surprised to see one young black woman giving an individual presentation instead of participating in a group one. I was impressed with her sophisticated analysis of racism and heterosexism in a contemporary film about gender, race,

sexuality, and class discrimination in 1950s America. None of the other groups who presented that day seemed to have as strong a critical perspective as hers. In fact, the other groups engaged in summary and textual analysis much more than in new, creative, or critical thinking. Although her teacher had not pointed her out to me before class, I assumed the black woman in the group of one was the “problem child” in the class that had “refused to work well” with the others. Her teacher later told me that it was indeed her and that it was a shame she had acted out and could not stay in the group. It did not take much for me to assess the situation. The lone black woman had, no doubt, shared her own critical perspective and had been summarily ignored, perhaps pushed out, by her group members. When I asked her teacher a bit more about the scenario, she volunteered that she did not think it was a “race” thing, since the film was not specifically about racism. Similar to our ideas about classrooms where all students engage in pleasant discussions, an idyllic classroom picture in many privileged white teachers’ minds involves groups of students who work together harmoniously. However, that harmony actually might be, more often than we realize, a troubling sign of dominant social relations being recreated in our classrooms in small group settings.

Encouraging class discussion, incorporating small group participation, and even attendance-taking and learning students’ names can result in a reproduction of discriminatory ways of being, even when we are engaging in those behaviors with an intention of disrupting discrimination and working to create liberating learning environments guided by discussion and collaborative

teacher-student learning. As many of us would probably agree, one component of engaged, effective pedagogy is establishing a sense of community in our classrooms by showing students the respect of learning and using their names. Even in what seems to be the most mundane task of taking attendance on the first day of class, the white teacher often reveals an ignorance about language and naming that tends to accompany class and race privilege. Chances are, the white teacher of writing speaks standardized English and pronounces without difficulty the names of her white, Euro-American students. While Joe, Sara, and Marc get recognized with ease, the teacher stumbles over Lazshariah, Sherrail, Xuan, and Min. These students suffer as the teacher struggles with pronouncing their names and asking them for assistance. As I shared my own experience of awkwardly pronouncing the names of my non-white non-Euro American students with a white male colleague of mine one day, he shared a similar story with me. Early on in the semester, as he was taking role and trying to get to know his students, he called out to a young man at the back of the room who appeared to be Hispanic: "You must be Chavez," he said. The student shook his head "no" as the others sat silently. "Oh, well . . . Gonzales, then?" inquired the teacher. Wrong again. "Oh, I'm sorry, you must be Caesar." On the third try the teacher got the name right, but I imagine those first seconds of assumptions must have seemed much longer than seconds to that student, as well as his classmates. Here is an example where the teacher tried his best to get to know the student while, in effect, further illustrating the white privilege of not "having to" be familiar with the pronunciation of the names of people of color. There are no social

sanctions against not knowing how to pronounce the name “Sherail” or in assuming a Hispanic student has a certain name. White teachers unfamiliar with the names of people of color model this privilege for all students and subsequently reinforce patterns of white normativity.

Instead of allowing students to introduce *themselves*, we assert the power of naming by calling students’ names off of our “official” lists. No doubt, thousands of white teachers across the country portray this damaging ignorance as they are getting to know their classes. The solution is a simple one; instead of “massacring” students’ names, we should provide opportunities for students to give voice to their own names and allow them to introduce themselves to us and their classmates.⁵⁹

In the following chapter, I discuss the potential that critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy has for helping students to come to new and more informed perspectives about their own lives and the world(s) around them. I discuss the value of critical pedagogies in the cultural studies writing classroom, specifically, and I also consider the rhetorical nature of social construction and its power in shaping affective dispositions—dispositions which play such a vital role in the formation of students’ and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about supremacy in contemporary culture. Drawing on the work of a variety of feminist scholars, I discuss the complex notion of love and how that notion might best be related to a politicized pedagogy that supports students while challenging them to interrogate their world views in relation to dominant ideology in contemporary United States society.

Chapter Four: Pedagogical Possibilities: Envisioning and Finding Support for a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy

It would be an easy and beautiful world indeed if eradicating white supremacy were as simple as asking students to introduce themselves in class, as easy as monitoring small groups closely and choosing the pedagogical techniques that come closer to leveling the playing field in those learning situations; as profoundly accommodating as encouraging discussion but also making room for silence in the classroom. If honest self-critique were all that it took for white teachers to create classrooms that support anti-racist, egalitarian educational goals; if understanding that the ways that we valorize standardized English can reinforce oppression even when we are working against standards that discriminate and reinforce ignorance; if learning to recognize and interrupt white talk were all it took, perhaps we could erase white supremacy from our everyday lives.

I am unable to offer any easy or well-mapped solution. However, I do offer a direction that points toward what is at once both a simple (some may say naïve) and profound pedagogy for enacting social change. It is a pedagogy centered on the complex notion of love as a hermetic that de-oppositionalizes intellect and affect and, in so doing, rejects the social constructivist binary of subject/object, advancing instead a more fully human view of the individual as citizen subject-agent.

Connecting the work of several scholars whose theories offer a framework for conceptualizing the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that I support, I identify the dangers of a reason/emotion split in education and the values of a process approach to teaching writing that investigates affective dimensions of racism in the cultural studies classroom. A pedagogy that studies culture (including distinct characteristics of affect) through language composition can be most meaningful for learners who are being encouraged to think critically and in new ways about their everyday lives. By encouraging the examination of affect and the social construction of it in society—as well as how that construction is made manifest in individual lives—critical pedagogues can engage in an honesty about everyday life and rigorous self-reflexivity that is vital for critical, feminist, anti-racist teaching and learning. In order to implement the pedagogy I advocate, it is crucial to zero in on the presence and power of affective dimensions in the classroom such as white denial, fear, and defensiveness.

The current social and educational orientation attempts to bifurcate reason and affect to the detriment all learners. Although the affective realm is usually denied, it is always present and, especially given its power to shape our perspectives, is always rhetorical. The rhetorical/political quality of affect within the realm of teaching writing is illuminated by the theories of contemporary rhetoricians Steve Mailloux and Richard Rorty. Additionally, Stanley Fish's writing about conviction is an important complement to Mailloux and Rorty's ideas about the omnipresence and power of rhetoric in constructing people's worldviews. Fish's ideas about belief as conviction—as that which has “the strongest hold on

us” (Olson 77)—supports a definition of affect as both feeling and judgment intertwined. It is not solely reason that leads us to think what we think; convictions (belief systems) are actually what accommodate and justify our various intellectual positions. A critical, feminist, anti-racist study of these positions, as well as the affective dimensions that fuel them, is valuable for helping teachers and students to learn more about themselves and the worlds around them; therefore, in this chapter I outline aspects of feminist theorist Chéla Sandoval’s landmark monograph *Methodology of the Oppressed* that I believe are especially helpful for theorizing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Sandoval’s conceptualization of “love as a hermeneutic” for approaching social change work, as well as the elaborate liberatory methods that she theorizes, are powerful indeed. Finally in this chapter, I discuss the extraordinary confluence of contemporary feminist scholars who, similar to Sandoval, consider the notion and power of “love” as an essential component of working for democratizing social change. Although an amorphous word for an amorphous concept, the word “love” leads to fascinating conceptualizations of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy committed to a study of the social construction of affect and geared toward creating democratizing social change.

Considering the Affective Realm with a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Writing Pedagogy

As I have indicated, the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that I advocate challenges students and teachers to engage actively in an investigation of the social construction of affect, especially their own affective investments, in relation to the affective realm sanctioned by today's contemporary United States culture. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is based on two key elements. The first involves acknowledging the genealogy of scientific thinking and how this thinking has influenced the traditional, Western, patriarchal emphasis on intellect and reason in education. This Cartesian bias toward intellect and reason has been inculcated through centuries of detached, abstract, rationalist scientific discourse. Critical pedagogies must make a purposeful move away from strictly rationalist inquiries and toward examinations of the distinct affective roles "assigned" and the responses compelled within contemporary United States society, especially in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identity categories. For example, complex social forces (including "ideological state apparatuses" such as contemporary military, media, government, family, and educational systems⁶⁰) construct women as more emotional than men; therefore, women are expected to perform this emotionality more than men in everyday life. People of color are stereotyped as "lower class" and more passionate, erotic, and expressive than white people. Because emotion and passion have been consistently devalued, women and people of color are, by extension, devalued and commodified. Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy requires students to

examine these varied and limiting messages about power, privilege, and affect as they are circulated in and through people and the various social structures in which we participate in United States culture.

The second aspect of enacting a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy involves displacing the patriarchal educational orientation that stigmatizes an acknowledgement of the affective terrain of the classroom, specifically. By “affective terrain” I mean the powerful affective dimensions that shape our (teachers’ and students’) thinking, talking, and writing about privilege and oppression in United States culture. These dimensions are complex and sometimes contradictory, but they must be respected if they are to be examined as a subject of study in the critical classroom. By considering and respecting these dimensions, educators foster an overall sense of respect for all learners in the classroom, respect that is a vital component of successful educational experiences.

Critical pedagogue Debra Jacobs has helped rhetoric and compositionists to see that understanding and teaching writing as an intellectual process that happens over time is key for helping students come to new critical consciousness in the cultural studies writing classroom. In a classroom context that compels our students to study what they most care about, such as the common cultural texts of their everyday lives, writing process pedagogy becomes ideal for compelling people to actively investigate their “affective constructions” that are part of the everyday, “quotidian consciousness.” Jacobs argues that by using process pedagogy, educators have the opportunity to “intervene” and “disrupt

understanding” of the ways that power is distributed for and against people in their everyday lives (e.g. in healthcare, housing, educational opportunity, and salaries). More specifically, process pedagogies that involve sustained attention to practices of invention—not just revision—are especially effective in helping students to “raise questions about their taken-for-granted understanding” of the everyday world (Jacobs 671). The kind of process pedagogy Jacobs advocates, then, is one that is based on the premise that new understanding must proceed from a critical hermeneuticist orientation, an orientation that seeks not simply to justify already sanctioned beliefs or judgments, but to interrogate them with an openness toward change, whether by a deepened conviction or by a new insight.

In the cultural studies writing classroom, educators can help students investigate those world(s) around them and their specific and various relationships in those world(s). No doubt, we must beware of cultural studies becoming a totalizing Master Narrative.⁶¹ Even with the insight that methods of cultural critique provide, we must continue to remind ourselves that we don’t have the Truth about culture and ideology; we will never step fully outside the dominant culture’s ideology. After all, it is the intricate, complex, confounding, and compelling nature of this ideology that works to shape us in the first place. Gary Olson posits convincingly in *Justifying Belief*,

The critically aware person understands that “truth” is contingent and socially constructed, and this understanding is itself thought to be emancipatory. It is not that the critically aware person can

escape the force of ideology; it's that critical awareness makes a qualitative difference in one's life. (23)

A critical, engaged, and liberatory pedagogy must work to help people investigate and “disrupt,” as Jacobs puts it, their understandings of their everyday, ideologically-bound convictions. Critical thinking is something that cannot be “taught” in a traditional, authoritarian, top-down format. Instead, as I have suggested, thinking critically and disrupting our own understandings is an approach that teachers must model and encourage their students to take. Feminist scholarship and whiteness studies, especially, have brought to light the value of both the theory and practice of self-reflection.⁶² Like self-reflection, self-reflexivity incorporates the notion of self examination; however, it adds to that reflection a willingness to make personal, progressive change. Critical anti-racist pedagogy has the goal of disrupting not just our students' understandings, but our own understandings—of our teaching and learning lives—as well.⁶³

The United States culture's patriarchal emphasis on intellect rather than emotion fractures teachers' abilities to learn along with their students in more wholehearted ways (hooks, “Teaching” 14-15). We are encouraged to avoid thinking critically “all the way around” issues and about our individual, everyday lives in relation to these issues. The effect of the reason-emotion split supports thinking, but only thinking defined as the supposed mastery of intellectual “scholarly bases.” The patriarchal emphasis on knowledge mastery with no

investigation into the affective realm supports a continued (intellectual) detachment from more fully “engaged” pedagogy.

bell hooks understands well the value of what she defines as an engaged pedagogy: “those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers with feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allows us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence, wholehearted” (“Teaching” 193). The subversion of this split is not sanctioned in a white supremacist status quo culture that perpetuates itself by invoking empty, color-blind, American-dream rationalizations. As I discussed earlier, Lynn Worsham has helped scholars to think about the ways that affect is a prime site of colonization, “historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual” (“Going” 216). We can learn to think and write more critically about ourselves and the worlds around us when our affective dispositions are respected as distinct, integral (albeit socially constructed) components of our conviction/belief systems.

As social constructions, our affective dispositions toward race, gender, class, physical abilities, etc., are not at all individual ones; though they have unique qualities they are created within the social realm. They are dispositions that evolve from our experiences in the political circumstances in which we live. Lawrence Grossberg theorizes the social construction of affect and pinpoints the effect of today’s popular conservatism: it creates ideological spaces, what he

terms “affective magnets,” which act to create our individual “mattering maps,” that is, what matters to us as individuals (282). Our affective dispositions toward power and privilege in our everyday lives are, in effect, created and controlled by and through the rhetoric fueled by the ideology of those in power; they are deeply connected to the individual’s concrete experiences, yet simultaneously circumscribed by the larger social structures that both encourage and discourage distinct modes of feeling and being in the world (Worsham 216). A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy helps us to remain cognizant of and, furthermore, to investigate the “structural and political” dimensions of what feels so very personal and individual, such as our particular opinions about white privilege, gender privilege, class privilege, etc. Indeed, what are the implications of a social structure that creates, manipulates and enforces in us “appropriate” affective responses to the dynamics of white supremacy. What does it mean to say that, in many ways, our feelings are not our own but are instead products of a “new conservative” dominant social ideology and its rhetoric? Is it possible to even have feelings separate from or in spite of ideology’s powerful hold? Can we trust our own emotions?

In the cultural studies writing classroom, asking our students to broaden their understanding of conviction to include paying attention not just to their intellectual ways of knowing but also to their affective ones is powerful, indeed. Although doing so may be difficult, it is imperative that we challenge our own and our students’ conflicting affective pulls to the texts of popular culture. It is precisely at our moments of complete abandonment, when we are “enjoying”

ourselves in our everyday lives (and our popular culture), that ideology has its most subtle yet undeniable grip. We will do best when we understand that every cultural artifact has a larger story, and that an engaged critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can support enlightening inquiries into ourselves and our attractions to these artifacts. Moreover, this pedagogy can help us to understand the ways that our selves, our attractions, and these artifacts are insulated in the larger world and the dominance structures that support it. Herein lies the value of “requir[ing] interventions over time that disrupt the quotidian stream of consciousness—processual interventions that include critical inquiry into ways of reading processes and products (and their means of production)” (Jacobs 670).

It is precisely this view of the value of a critical hermeneutic process approach to writing that has long been promoted (although unfortunately largely misunderstood and unheeded) by Janice Lauer. For nearly two decades, Lauer has been a leading voice in championing an intensive process pedagogy that emphasizes critical invention strategies. As we write, we learn, and we “disrupt understanding” (Jacobs). In a cultural studies writing classroom, we can “investigate our own questions, issues, and cultural assumptions” (Lauer 1). An intensive, inquisitive approach that suspends Truth and closure in favor of new questions and tentative answers about ourselves and our practices of affective cultural consumption gives us “a chance to catch those swiftly passing moments of loving, encountering, learning, wondering and fearing and to hold them long enough to find personal meaning” (Lauer 3). A writer learns best when s/he starts from a place of inquiry into her or his own cultural assumptions. This is writing

that can be most transformative, as pedagogical theorist Judith Harris might put it. And “[w]hen an individual changes, a politics changes” (Harris 673). The personal is political. To investigate the personal in our everyday lives (which includes our own research and pedagogical approaches) is to come closer to new understandings about ourselves in context with the world around us. Further, those understandings can lead to positive, democratic ideas about our own affective dispositions in conjunction with the larger social structures in which we live. And, further still, those positive, democratic ideas provide democratizing social change in ourselves and in those with whom we share our private and public lives.

Challenging students to interrogate affective dispositions related to popular texts such as music and music videos, movies, T.V. shows, advertisements, and websites is an especially useful (and often enjoyable!) approach. While critical pedagogy that investigates popular culture is a dominant trend in cultural studies writing classrooms today, it seems that more often than not we ignore or paper over the affective responses that draw us to these popular “texts.” Feminist cultural studies theorist Chris Weedon argues:

Emotion is central to popular culture. From the emotions produced by popular music to cinema violence and horror films, people seek out heightened experience of emotions. Indeed, feelings of closeness, belonging, caring, well-being are among the key reasons given by young people for consumption of [the drug]

ecstasy in clubs and at parties. Style and feeling “cool” are emotional responses which transform subjectivities, at least temporarily. (47)

By redirecting students toward an examination of their affective dispositions toward their favorite cultural texts, we make an important step, not only claiming the right to and responsibility for examining our everyday worlds, but also claiming the “personal” experience as political and worthy of examination. Critic Joan Scott has show us that drawing conclusions from personal experience without paying attention to distinct, historical and political contexts surrounding those experiences can be dangerous, essentializing business. In contrast, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that incorporates assignments that require students to examine the cultural texts to which they are drawn in terms of their own attitudes, values, beliefs and the cultural sources that inform them can be liberating. Pedagogies such as this are an excellent starting point for encouraging (and modeling) self-reflection and, ultimately, self-reflexivity.

No doubt, working with students to develop this type of self-reflexivity is vital to this pedagogy. However, it would be irresponsible, not to mention short sighted, to say that our teaching ends there. The fact is that affect is always present, in any and every exchange in our classrooms, whether we are studying it in relation to popular culture or not. Instead of denying the reality of the affective realm, which would be hypocritical at best, we have to accept its presence, recognize its power, and even tap into its potential. The still dominant

reason/emotion split in United States society is a damaging, socially constructed separation of the thinking/feeling self. And the split often leads to dysfunctional, inadequate education. In today's detached, over-rationalized schooling environments, teachers are compelled (often by students and colleagues alike) to "disavow our loves, our loves of learning, our passion for teaching, our care and concern for our students," as well as "our love of inquiry" (Liston and Garrison 2-3).

At a time when conservative politics and conservative politicians dominate United States government and society, at a time when the political center has made a dramatic shift to the right, at a time when conservative backlash pervades our everyday lives, it is more urgent than ever for teachers/scholars/public intellectuals to renew their commitment to fostering critical consciousness in their students.⁶⁴ Educators must make a central tenet of our pedagogy the understanding that our affective dispositions are, in effect, created and controlled by and through the ideology of those in power; the affective realm is deeply connected to the individual's concrete experiences yet simultaneously circumscribed by larger social structures that both encourage and discourage distinct affective responses (Worsham, "Going" 216).

Critical pedagogies that compel learners to investigate affective dimensions of issues such as racism are risky and controversial. Each time educators facilitate a class that is alive with debate and discussion we are sure to experience and incite strong reactions, both intellectual and emotional. However, recent theoretical moves in composition studies and feminist theory that involve

examining not just the politics of reason but also the politics of emotion⁶⁵ support my claim for a theory and practice of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy attuned to the complexities of affect.

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy asks, what are the implications of a social structure that creates, manipulates, and enforces in people appropriate affective responses to the world around us? What does it mean to say that, in many ways, our feelings are not our own but are instead products of a dominant ideology, of a “new conservatism?” Is it possible to have feelings separate from or in spite of ideology’s powerful hold? Can we ever trust our own emotions?

Feminist educational theorist and whiteness studies scholar Audrey Thompson envisions the classroom as a “third space” of possibility (“Entertaining” 433). Interested in pedagogy as performance, Thompson understands learning as experience that is created and continually (re)generated. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy necessarily follows Thompson’s lead by resisting the Western, rationalist, patriarchal urge to understand the classroom as solely a place for learning from static knowledge bases, repositories. The critical classroom is a place for positioning oneself to embark on new journeys—such as conducting inquiries into the realm of affect, and not just conducting excavations into old, standard territories (“Entertaining” 432-3).

Although I have a sense that those of us who pursue the realm of affect in the context of intellectual inquiry are in the minority, I am energized to see that Thompson does not underestimate the power of relation (“Entertaining” 432).⁶⁶ So many of us are trained to actively reject, neglect, or remain oblivious to ever-

present and complex dynamics of interpersonal relations. Teachers and students are reticent—to say the least—to acknowledge and investigate the realm of affect. As Thompson posits, the pedagogical situation is an especially rich, relational (affective) experience for students and teachers alike. In today's usually sterilized educational climate, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical theory of affect as I define it challenges dominant paradigms and acknowledges, analyzes, and cultivates, as well as critiques, the politics of relationality in our profession, most notably in our classrooms. Unfortunately, though, “[a]ll too often, emotions are taken as affective upheavals in an otherwise smoothly functioning and reasonable process” (Liston and Garrison 2).⁶⁷ A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy does not have to interpret emotions as “affective upheavals.” Instead, the pedagogy that I advocate disrupts the United States culture's logocentric orientation and asks us to recognize the affect bound up in everyday relations. This is not to deny that logic and reason are tied intricately to affect. As I have tried to establish, it is *unreasonable* and even damaging to attempt to sanitize our classrooms and divorce affect from the realm of thinking. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can be strengthened by appreciating the complexity of affect and relationality and by examining the intricate, sometimes contradictory, quality of affective relations in the cultural studies writing classroom.

It is vital to note, though, that an appreciation for and examination of relationality and coalition is complicated. Power is always at work in the affective realm. There is no neutral zone in the classroom. Thompson has noted the danger of educators appealing to “an authentic relational orientation grounded in

social innocence” (Thompson, “Not” 530). Indeed, the “third space” of the classroom is still a space where people—constructed in the undeniably discriminatory social world—meet to learn together. Although I champion a theoretical and methodological pedagogy which is guided by Sandoval’s notion of love as a hermeneutic, I understand that “love” cannot possibly be a cure for all that ails a racist and sexist society (and our colleagues and students who live in it). A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy acknowledges the social construction of people and the affective realm, and, instead of clinging to feel-good relationality as an innocent savior of classroom interactions, it complicates and analyzes the power dynamics of that relationality, specifically in terms of race and gender.⁶⁸ The educational goal of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is both sound and rigorous: it is to challenge constantly ourselves and the worlds around us, to learn more about the social construction of affect and how that shapes our and our students’ worldviews.

Rhetoric, Language, and Affect in Theory and Pedagogical Practice

Understanding and teaching about rhetoric—the realm of language and persuasion—is vital to a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy of affect. Olson asserts that, “for nearly half a century, scholars from practically every intellectual discipline have asserted a strong connection between rhetoric and epistemology. . . . [S]cholar after scholar . . . has affirmed the centrality of rhetoric in the making of knowledge” (76). Thinking about the always already rhetorical nature of our

lives is important because it encourages the complex thinking, self-reflexivity, and honesty (with ourselves and our students) that I have argued for in this project. Writing pedagogy, and perhaps even any pedagogy, is most (only?) effective when it recognizes the rhetoricity of both language and the social construction of affect and makes them key elements of consideration.

Rorty's "The Contingency of Language" explicates the social quality of knowledge by turning to Donald Davidson's philosophy of language, which contends that people use language to invent descriptions that are useful for predicting and controlling what happens. Unlike Kantian and Hegelian ideas about "Truth" as an essence that can be obtained and explained, Rorty believes it is language, which is created in the realm of the social, that makes "truth statements" about the world. Thus, we must make a distinction between descriptive claims about the concrete world out there and claims about "The Truth" of the world out there (67).⁶⁹ Post-modern discourse such as Rorty's has shown us that humans use language to describe the world, not to capture truths, for there are no truths we hold about ourselves or our world(s) that are not created in and through language (and people). "The world does not speak. Only we do," writes Rorty. "The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that" (68). Thus, all language is contingent, dependent on people and their use of it.⁷⁰ In the cultural studies writing classroom, both teachers and students can and must explore the social construction of language and how our worldviews are implicated in this

construction. How are we affected by and how do we affect other people in the complex web of social construction in which we participate?

Scholars who are often labeled neo-pragmatists, such as Rorty, Fish, Mailloux, and Olson help us to see that it is useless to hold onto the Enlightenment project of pinning down truths about—in terms of my project—our affective dispositions toward race and race privilege. Rorty, for example, says that “our purposes would be served best by ceasing to see truth as a deep matter. . . . The nature of truth is an unprofitable topic” (70).⁷¹ Instead, searches for new language, new vocabularies, and new tools will help us to find new and useful ways of describing multiple, contingent, socially constructed truths. Fish describes it this way, “knowledge for human beings is discourse-specific, infinitely revisable, and never full or complete” (Fish xiii). For the cultural studies writing classroom, the search for knowledge is undertaken with the understanding that we are trying to *come closer* to making *contingent* sense of power relations and their impact on specifically classed, raced, gendered, etc., citizen subjects.

Mailloux understands that rhetoric points to the intricacy of power relationships. There is no “outside” of ideology: “it’s all rhetorical—all the way down—and interpretation all the way around” Mailloux’s notion of rhetorical hermeneutics demonstrates that the notion of “objectivity” is nothing more than a “compliment we pay to particular interpretations.” Understanding how language and ideology are constructed and circulated in culture, “cultural rhetoric study”

becomes Mailloux's rhetorical version of cultural studies. With this type of inquiry, we can track how tropes/arguments/narratives work at specific historical and cultural moments. What rhetoricians do is study the uses of language. And politically speaking, rhetoric is invaluable in helping us to analyze material realities (of white supremacy, sexism, classism, etc.). Mailloux understands that our everyday, socially constructed existence is "rhetoric all the way down, interpretation all the way around, and ideology here, there, and everywhere." Cultural understandings are accounted for rhetorically at specific rhetorical moments.

I am interested in what Mailloux's theory of rhetoric and Fish's notion of belief might mean for us as educators trying to engage in the teaching and practice of self-reflexivity through writing and a study of culture and affect. Conviction is that which is based on belief. For Fish, our "convictions are what have the strongest hold on us" (Olson 77). Similar to my argument about affect consisting of both emotion and judgment, Olson understands Fish's idea that "faith and reason are not in opposition; they are in fact, mutually interdependent" (Olson 77). People's strongest stances originate "not from a logical argument but from a heartfelt conviction, and all logical reasoning, justification, and argumentation flow from that conviction" (Olson 77). Thus it is belief and heartfelt conviction that hold us most forcefully; we use our thinking to justify our beliefs:

. . . we each begin from a position, a conviction, and that conviction and the structure of beliefs to which it is attached will cause us to

interpret evidence in such a way as to buttress that conviction and belief system and to repulse challenges to them. (Olson 78)

It is not detached *reason* or *logic* that convey answers or truths. Instead, it is our convictions or beliefs which are fueled by affect—in addition to reason—that lead us to our worldviews. By extension, it is possible to understand something—for example, for a white person to logically understand that non-white skin color does not make a person inferior to her—but not to “believe” or embrace this understanding with any conviction: “what we know is not necessarily what we believe,” writes Harris (674). Or, as Olson explains it, “There is a substantial difference . . . between apprehending the literal meaning of a proposition and experiencing the truth of that utterance in a deeply heartfelt way” (79). I am interested in interrogating the affective dispositions that surround convictions about race that white people hold to be true in “deeply heartfelt ways.”

Outlining the Theory that Fuels a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy:

Chéla Sandoval, Ethics, and Love as a Hermeneutic

In addition to studying the social construction of affect in larger society, specifically how that construction affects our understandings of race, it is helpful for educators and students to understand better how that construction gets played out through individual learners (students and teachers) in our classrooms. Contemporary scholars’ and students’ ideas about relationality, most notably

relationality in the classroom, are interesting to consider as linked to the concept of love. Most notably, Chéla Sandoval's theory of love as a hermeneutic can serve as an important antidote to the fragmented experience of all citizen subject-agents living in late capitalist, post modernist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy. Sandoval's project, as well as my own, strives to theorize the way that love as a hermeneutic can foster democratizing social change (136).⁷² Sandoval's theory of love, that which circumscribes the ideological forms she defines as key to the emancipatory methodology of those who are oppressed is a valuable concept that can be instructive not only for those who are "more" oppressed in today's racist and sexist status quo, but also for those, such as myself, who are more privileged. With this approach, I hope to further Sandoval's vision and to enact new types and moments of force, power, and possibility in the ways that people think about, and more importantly improve, the concrete realities of individuals living in United States society today.

Sandoval sees the work of scholars she identifies as "third-world writers," such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Franz Fanon, Che Guevera, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cherie Moraga, and Emma Perez, as sharing a common definition of love as "'breaking' through whatever controls in order to find 'understanding and community': [love] is described as 'hope' and 'faith' in the potential goodness of some promised land" (140). With a tempered yet faithful hope comes Sandoval's theory of "'love' as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen subject-agents, regardless of social class" (140). The concept of love in new and productive forms is a heuristic for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy.

Indeed, the notion of love can be instrumental for a pedagogical theory and practice shaped by, in spite of, and in resistance to the strife, pain, and misery, as well as temporary joys and exhilarations, associated with living and struggling in contemporary United States society today.

In order to develop love as a hermeneutic, as a method of interpreting, understanding, and navigating the complicated worlds in which we all live, students and teachers can achieve what Sandoval defines as differential or oppositional consciousness, an awareness that enables Others to engage in other “ideological forms” that comprise the methodology of the oppressed.⁷³ In order to gain this awareness, the citizen subject-agent must learn how to deconstruct complex sign systems in order to gain insight into the power relations operating within and through them. Influenced by Roland Barthes’ notion of semiotics, Sandoval insists that the citizen subject-agent must be able to read dominant ideologies as created, maintained, and enforced through various social systems.⁷⁴ In terms of enacting a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, this means studying with our students the texts of our culture and learning to read them for signs of dominant ideologies at work. With the commitment to “blurring” the reason/emotion split, teachers and students can read the emotional appeals and the political assumptions associated with these texts that lead people to holding particular racist, sexist, classist etc. worldviews. Thus we can come to recognize both the sign systems and the affective dimensions of those systems that are invisible and normativizing, and we can learn to read them with a more critical eye.

Like Sandoval's methodology, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy requires a commitment to a democratic ideal, what Sandoval terms an "ethics" (44). For Sandoval, the ethics consist of five "ideological forms," all necessary to the process(es) of mobilizing for democratizing social change.⁷⁵ The first, "the equal rights ideological form," posits the understanding that equality for all peoples to be the main and unifying goal of emancipation (56). While assimilationist and integrationist in nature, this equal-rights ideology is at times necessary in order to forge connections between disparate ideas and groups in the name of a "greater good."

This form is especially relevant for today's college classroom. It is important to take into consideration (indeed, how can one forget?) that our classrooms are composed of radically different individuals. While we are all socially constructed through, among other things, white supremacist, sexist, and classist sign systems, we have radically different perspectives. Some socially privileged students are able to read easily dominant ideology's sign systems, while other students are threatened by a critical pedagogy that asks them to recognize and challenge the dominant status quo. The equal-rights ideology is that which strives to make empowering, temporarily unifying connections among disparate peoples, such as those in our classrooms.

The second ideological form of the ethics that Sandoval envisions is the "revolutionary form" (56). Radically different from the equal rights form, the revolutionary form does not work to establish equal rights within the dominant structures of society. Instead, this ideology is one that aspires to dramatically

restructure dominant categories and social hierarchies. The revolutionary ideology holds in sight the “goal of functioning beyond all domination/subordination power axes” (56-7). The idealistic hope for complete revolution and social equality is a key facet of this form. The revolutionary form is especially appealing because it maintains a utopian vision that is crucial, I believe, for any peoples doing the difficult, sometimes seemingly insurmountable, work of trying to bring about democratizing change. Although a major social revolution is not (perhaps) feasible at this time, the revolutionary ideology assists us in envisioning what we can move toward, if not wholly achieve.

Sandoval’s third ideological form, “supremacism,” enables “the oppressed [to] not only *claim* their differences, but also [to] assert that their differences have provided them access to a higher evolutionary level than that attained by those who hold social power” (57). Armed with the claim that the oppressed have access to experience and knowledge of social structures that the privileged cannot see from their vantage point, “[t]he mission of the supremacist practitioners of oppositional consciousness is to provide the social order a higher ethical and moral vision” (57).

The supremacist ideological form provides especially important information for people who are privileged by race, gender, class, etc. and do not have access to the vantage point of the oppressed. Privilege systems work best through their invisibility. As discussed, racism maintains its invisibility, among other ways, through challenges of so-called “reverse racism” made by people who do not see their privilege but are the ones who actually benefit from racism.

Consider the claim of a teacher who believes that it would be unfair, a type of reverse racism, to silence a white student who argues that there is no such thing as racism. Critic Megan Boler introduces the term “affirmative action pedagogy” to counter such beliefs (“Editor’s” vii). By challenging racist or other oppressive worldviews as they are being expressed by our colleagues and students, affirmative action pedagogy is a sort of “supremacist” pedagogy that validates those who experience oppression.

It is quite common for white people to maintain that they believe in “equal rights” for all people and that United States citizens now live in an “equal society” and compete on a “level playing field” where racism is no longer an “issue.” Obviously, this is not the case. Sandoval’s “supremacist ideology” endorses educational discussions about various facets of privilege, including teaching concrete facts about privilege in everyday life.⁷⁶ Sandoval’s supremacism makes room for helping privileged people (whether they are privileged based on their race, gender, economic class or a combination thereof) to see that privilege structures really *do* exist.

Sandoval’s fourth ideological form, the “separatist ideology,” can be used as necessary to separate oneself from oppressive social structures (57). Occasionally, as in the instance of women’s-only spaces formed during the feminist movement of the 1970s, groups find a need to “protect and nurture” themselves as an entity in temporary separation. Alice Walker also refers to temporary separatism as sometimes necessary for women’s health (xi). Several of today’s women’s music festivals are actively separatist, as well.

Those people with more social privilege usually do not recognize or feel the need for (temporary) separatism; after all, they enjoy membership(s) in dominant groups that have the privilege of being the majority. Therefore, privileged people are more comfortable or “at home” in the world. Furthermore, those with more social privileges see temporary separatism not only as unnecessary but also as a cause of further divides between diverse groups of people. By naming separatism as a necessary ideological form, Sandoval creates an opportunity for the privileged to think specifically about separatism and the misunderstandings they may have about it. Moreover, stressing importance of temporary separatism validates those who may feel the need to separate.

The fifth and final ideological form is the mode of “differential or oppositional consciousness,” which is similar to the clutch in an automobile. With differential or oppositional consciousness the citizen subject-agent gains the ability to “shift” or weave between and among the other four oppositional ideologies. This shifting is that which helps people to develop and maintain the strength necessary to move toward democratizing social change; differential or oppositional consciousness is both an empowering *form* of awareness and a *process* by which citizen subject-agents can “assume” or “engage in” the various ideological forms in productive ways that can effect democratizing social change. Sandoval explains that the differential or oppositional consciousness “has a mobile, retroactive, and transformative effect on the previous four [ideologies], setting them all into diverse processual relationships” (55). As processual

relationships, the categories of ideology (equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist) seem to offer moments of fixed meaning and possibility, reminiscent of a “strategic essentialism” around which people and ideas can coalesce.⁷⁷

Sandoval’s theories about distinct “methodologies” of the oppressed (moving among the ideological forms in order to effect democratizing social change) can be extremely valuable for critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogues and the learners in their classrooms. The “equal rights ideology” is that which might appeal best to disparate peoples who do not agree on much more than the fact that society “should be equal.” The “revolutionary ideology” is the necessary opposite of the “equal rights ideology” because it makes room for a distinct fight against the injustice that may not be recognized by all people but is definitely experienced by many. Following this, the “supremacist ideology” allows for the education of those who have heretofore not recognized privilege structures in contemporary United States society. Sandoval’s concept of “supremacist ideology” allows privileged students to become more familiar with the various vantage points of those who are less or differently privileged. The “separatist ideology” provides for the conception of a “safe space,” where those who are oppressed can find temporary salvation from dominant and oppressive social ideologies. Finally, the ideology of differential or oppositional consciousness is that which may help citizen subject-agents to “engage in” and “see” the various ideological forms with the goal of enacting democratizing social change. Sandoval’s descriptions of various and empowering ideological forms—

circumscribed by her theory of love as a hermeneutic—have concrete implications for teaching and learning (inside and outside the classroom). In the following section, I garner support for my theory of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy by outlining arguments made by a variety of contemporary feminist scholars who consider love, coalition, and the challenge of working for democratizing social change.

Love and Coalition: Feminist Theories of Coalition and Their Implications for a Critical, Feminist, Anti-racist Pedagogy

A variety of contemporary feminist theorists—most notably Wendy Brown, Kathy Ferguson, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, Chantal Mouffe, and Chéla Sandoval—seem to be creating theories which resonate with each other in various and empowering ways. These scholars all write about theories and methods for envisioning and fostering democratizing social change, and they seem committed to bringing about that change by theorizing the complexities and possibilities of human connection, coalition, and love—all concepts that reject or “blur” the entrenched, patriarchal reason/emotion split. The connections I make between these scholars support well my argument that love as a hermeneutic is a theory that holds great promise for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of these scholars’ approaches is their fluidity—their openness to critique. I attempt to model this openness to enrich my concept of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that is based upon love as a

hermeneutic by injecting potential complications to my argument throughout this and the following chapter.

United States society is composed of diverse individuals who have been constructed in diverse moments under diverse circumstances. Our perspectives are shaped by the concrete circumstances of our lives, especially in terms of the privileges we have (or do not have) in relation to economic class, racial and ethnic identity, gender and sexual orientation, etc. The feminist critics I have identified recognize that, given immense power differentials and their subsequent effects on individual perspectives, the notion of a complete and collective movement toward democratizing social change is unlikely. Although they theorize ways of looking at the world and ways of forming coalition that will lead to democratizing social change, they are also cognizant of the fact that there are limits, that coalition and/or “love” can do only so much to move people toward more democratic worldviews.

Nonetheless, Sandoval’s notion of love as a hermeneutic fueled by differential or oppositional consciousness can be immensely empowering. I want to connect the theoretical concept of differential or oppositional consciousness, with its ability to slide between ideological forms (its ability to morph, queer, and displace, as well as transgress them), to the powerful notion of “mobile subjectivities” as imagined by feminist political theorist Kathy Ferguson in *The Man Question*. In lieu of fixed, static conceptions of identity and agency, Ferguson offers the concept of “mobile subjectivities.” By “enacting” or “performing” mobile subjectivity, citizen subject-agents possess a sense of irony,

in that they can understand people's positioning and group memberships or coalitions as contingent, complex, conflicted, and powerful. The mobile subject's positioning is never too rooted to *not be uprooted* for the sake of coalition (154).⁷⁸

Conceptions such as Sandoval's ideological forms and Ferguson's mobile subjectivities are useful for theorizing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical enactment of coalition politics geared toward democratizing social change. Acknowledging and analyzing relationality and affective dimensions of our lives and our teaching, teachers and students can find meaningful, if contingent, coalitions through mutual commitments to larger political goals. This practice seems in line with Sandoval's equal rights ideology, which I interpret as a call for diverse peoples (e.g., students and teachers) to agree upon and strive toward goals of more equitable, democratic social relations.

In addition to Ferguson's mobile subjectivities and Sandoval's notion of empowering movement across ideological forms, Haraway's concept of being always already socially "positioned," yet embedded in webs of connection, is also helpful for my project. Haraway writes: "we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities" ("Situated" 187). Sandoval, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Noël Sturgeon all seem to argue that freedom-minded individuals seek each other, coalesce, form coalitions around a common goal of emancipation, and work together to effect democratizing social change. I imagine this as the ultimate model of the classroom informed by a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy.

The problem, though, becomes defining what and who is “freedom-minded.” Haraway argues for “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being” (“Situated” 195). A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy arises from and is ever cognizant of the reality of United States (and global) relations of domination and their effects on real people’s lives, yet it maintains the lofty goal of (in the case of my project, students and teachers) enacting democratizing social change. In her more recent work, Haraway calls for “collected, networked, situated practices of witnessing” (*Modest* 267). In fact, Haraway cites Sandoval’s theory of differential or oppositional consciousness as a theory and method that can be “learned broadly.” She suggests that Sandoval’s theory is a “nonreductive, noninnocent, achieved political-semiotic sensibility” (*Modest* 275 n. 2). Understanding the need for and possibility of group membership that takes into account our vast differences can lead to the citizen subject-agent’s ability to transgress dominant social hierarchy—the white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy—in order to form meaningful coalitions.

As Ferguson writes, mobile subjectivities “seek strategies by which to stay honest about our affirmations while we keep moving toward them” (154). The critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogue’s affirmations or desires to dismantle the white supremacist patriarchy are, certainly, broad and dangerously utopian, yet they are vital if those of us who are linked to different communities are to continue working with others toward something better and more equal than what “we” have now. Likening the struggle to theorize and enact democratizing social

change to a game of cat's cradle in which one makes "string figures on fingers," Haraway explains that democratizing social change activists "rely on relays from many hands" in the struggle to connect and work for emancipation of oppressed peoples (*Modest* 268). Cat's cradle is a game of patterns and knots, which requires great skill. "Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone" (*Modest* 269).

It is collectivity that I want to emphasize here, for its very theorization leads to notions of possibility and methods by which to make those possibilities for democratizing social change a reality. Thus, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy joins students and teachers in what could be described as a collective, pedagogical dance choreographed to a "melody of Freirean emancipation."⁷⁹

Feminist theorist Wendy Brown offers an interesting and useful way to imagine the difficult work of coming together in coalition. Individuals with commitments to democratization must be willing and able to subsume in some form their "I-ness" (their unique, concrete identities constructed at given moments in particular locations, formed at the nexus of race, class, gender, sexual, and other power-infused relations that construct identity). When people temporarily subsume the "I" in favor of an "abstract 'we' represented by the [radically diverse, yet] universal community of the state," there is more space and possibility for coalition politics (Brown 56). Similar to Sandoval's equal-rights ideological form, subscribing to Brown's communal "we" can be a concrete method for mobilization in our classrooms, the academy, and perhaps larger society, as well.

Buttressed with “a new vision and world of thought and action, of theory and method, of alliance,” a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can lead students and teachers to imagine and create common spaces around which to mobilize (Brown 56). Identity or individual student perspective is not shed, but is instead understood to be the multiplicitous embodiment of diverse experience that carries with it the potential for alliance. Brown poses a central question:

What if we sought to supplant the language of “I am”—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning—with the language of “I want this for us”? (75)

Brown’s concept of political orientation as “I want this for us” is an incredibly powerful notion for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy as it points toward the goal of individuals working in coalition for equality. I sense an echo of Brown’s call for liberation in the work of Chantal Mouffe, another political theorist who understands the complexities of coalitions. Rhetoric and composition scholars Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham have introduced the work of Mouffe to the field in their collection titled *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*. In an interview with Worsham and Olson, Mouffe suggests that there will always be social struggle, and because of the nature of struggle, some will always be excluded in the name of consensus. “Every consensus is by nature exclusionary” but that exclusion does not exist in final form (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 172). Instead, “a radical democratic society is one in which every form and basis of exclusion is continually put in question” (Worsham and Olson 167). Parallel to the “logic of

exclusion,” Mouffe posits a “logic of universal inclusion” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 189). The two logics circulate in continual tension, and the result is Mouffe’s concept of the *societas*, “a bond which links citizens together;” *societas* involves consensus, but leaves room for dissensus, for “different understandings of values” (183). Mouffe recognizes that there will always be hegemonic struggle; there will always be struggle between individuals in the name of freedom projects.⁸⁰ For her, politics means “the impossibility of a completely harmonious society” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 173), yet in striving for a more equitable social harmony people can “make room for dissensus” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 176): “There is no such thing as ‘the’ [a single] common good,” Mouffe explains, “even though it’s an horizon that we cannot do without” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 179).

Feminist activist Bernice Johnson Reagon offers insights into the difficulties of coalescing for the “common good” in her oft-cited text, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century.” First delivered as a speech at a women’s music festival in the late 1960s, Johnson Reagon suggests that those who work for democratizing social change should feel “threatened to the core”—if they are doing it “right” and “well.” In fact, “*really* doing coalition work” means feeling as if one is going to “keel over and die” at any minute (356). There is no real safety or comfort in coalition. Instead, “[c]oalition work . . . is some of the most dangerous work you can do” (359).

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy encourages students and teachers to take the risk of coming together across difference. Beyond this, it offers

opportunities for us to engage in the freedom projects we find most compelling. It argues that harmonies of common good or solidarity—solidarity that is inclusive of difference yet moves “beyond it” in striving toward a common good—can be powerful.

This notion of optimistic striving toward a common good, despite the immense difficulties inherent in coalition, is indicative of a strong orientation toward a problematized yet persistent note of hope. Freire speaks to the issue of a critical, yet enduring hope. He writes:

I reject the notion that nothing can be done about the consequences of economic globalization and refuse to bow my head gently because nothing can be done against the unavoidable. (43)

In a resonant vein, Haraway calls for hope, as well:

I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope. (*Modest* 265)

Indeed, what ties together the works I am citing here are the fragile and persistent threads of hope (reminiscent of Haraway’s cat’s cradle) weaving in and out of this theory springing from and grounded in the harsh realities of everyday life. In the face of gross social inequities in today’s political climate, hope is a narrative that keeps “us” going. Haraway posits that, “cat’s cradle is a game for nominalists like me who cannot not desire what we cannot possibly have”

(*Modest* 268). Despite the reality that complete democratization will perhaps never be achieved, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is supported by the work of the many theorists, students and teachers alike, who are bound together by a yearning for something better.⁸¹

Yearning for something better involves an active striving toward democratizing social change. This, I argue, is where the concept of love can be most helpful for those of us who (often struggle to) maintain commitments to fostering democratizing social change in the face of what seems like ever-increasing adversity under global capitalism in the United States's white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. Sandoval's "physics of love," a.k.a. "love as a hermeneutics," is a fascinating and complex overarching principle that drives the differential or oppositional consciousness necessary for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. "Love as a social movement," writes Sandoval, "is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen [subject-agent]-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation" (184). Indeed, love as a hermeneutic works to connect all of us—all citizen subject-agents, including students, teachers, and theorists—who are looking for intellectual and actual methods that lead to concrete, democratizing social change.

I do recognize, along with the scholars I have been citing here, that a vision of a "loving," democratic society is the loftiest, most utopian vision of all, and it could be argued that it is connected directly to the humanist vision of an Enlightenment search for Truth in the name of humankind. Some may suggest I might as well just quote the Beatles' "All we need is love" and leave it at that.

When viewed from this angle, love as a hermeneutic reifies the reason/emotion split and becomes an essentialist thrust toward simple (and unrealistic) “happy endings.” But the love I am referring to is a more informed, thoughtful, purposeful and *critical* love, one that challenges ourselves and others in the hopes of creating greater good for all people. For a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, love as a hermeneutic can attach both a meaning and an approach to an amorphous concept that looks something like hope, like consensus, like *societas*, like community, like “wanting for us” in order to conceptualize, and more importantly *implement*, strategic moves toward emancipation.

Precisely because it is so amorphous and ambiguous, the word love is an ideal part of the conceptualization of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Wielded in the service of democratizing social change through intellectual commitment as well as pointing towards rich human connection and relationality, the “love” informing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is not an unproblematic one; there is no love where power and oppression do not exist. Holding on to love and hope with a critical understanding of their complexities is perhaps the best chance “we” have for forming alliances capable of doing “good” for “us.”

The term love connotes an impulse towards passion. Considering passion as more than impulse is valuable for this theory of love connected to a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Mouffe explains that passion is that which really “moves people to act in politics” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 197). “Reason” and individual “interests” are no doubt impetuses for political action; but passion (as a

“placeholder for desire and for [a] collective form of identification”) works to assemble individuals working toward a greater “common good” (Worsham and Olson 197). The vital “issue for democratic politics is how we can mobilize those passions toward democratic designs” (Worsham and Olson 197). The mobilization of passions is very much linked to a pedagogical theory of love that proves to be at worst beneficial and at best revolutionary. Love as a hermeneutic supports the work it takes to challenge our deeply held convictions and usually unquestioned world views—the kind of activity that this pedagogy requires. Moreover, teaching and learning through a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy with love as its hermeneutic is an important method of mobilizing passions in productive, emancipatory ways.

There seems to be much support for my argument that considering affective dimensions and valuing a “critical” love can be instrumental for an everyday approach to teaching, learning, and living in more democratic ways. Cultural critic bell hooks, for example, obviously champions the theorization of love for effecting democratizing social change. Three of her most recent books, *All About Love: New Visions*, *Salvation: Black People and Love*, and *Communion: The Female Search for Love* call for a definition and implementation of the concept of love in order to better the circumstances of all people, especially those who receive few (if any) benefits under a late capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy. hooks defines love as much more than a feeling; love involves “various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (*All* 5). A

love grounded in actions that demonstrate respect is positive force, especially as it “automatically assumes accountability and responsibility” (13). Beyond personal commitments to loving each other, hooks sees love’s potential to enact democratizing social change.

It is this love ethic, similar to an ethic of care as envisioned by feminist theorists such as Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto, that encodes possibility for harnessing emotional power in the name of revolution. The contributions of both Noddings and Tronto have great resonance with feminists who analyze critically the complexities of love in terms of pedagogy and larger social movements. hooks states, “I want to know love’s truths as we live them” (xxv). The “truths” of love can be registered on a variety of scales, but most importantly for this project, they can be found in the classroom and in the academy as we enact a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy.

In *Salvation*, hooks argues that love will be what works to “uplift” African Americans in racist United States society (*Salvation* 209). Loving in a concrete, material way will enable African Americans to find love for themselves, their families, and “their people.” Similar to separatism and supremacism as defined by Sandoval, hooks’ love as salvation works to make differences in real lives. Her call is similar to what I have been sketching: people “need to vigilantly create the alternative ground where our love can grow and flourish” (hooks, *Salvation* 185). hooks argues that the call to love in previous emancipatory movements such as the civil rights movement under Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a call that

involved more than politics; it involved “a call to stand for justice and freedom with one’s whole heart, body, mind, and spirit” (210).

I believe that it takes an investment of this magnitude, an investment of *more* than the mind (as well as an investment of more than feeling), in order to effect marked democratizing social change. A hermeneutics of love is an orientation towards people that makes passionate struggle for democratizing social change its focus. Only in the struggle for justice and equality can love truly flourish in a way that brings *about* that justice and equality. More work needs to be done in this arena of theorizing love as a force that combines connection, coalition, and care. Not in the least bit “touchy-feely,” this concept of love makes manifest a hope for more and better things for all people. It is grounded in the reality that those who are not white, not male, not heterosexual, not able-bodied, not Christian, and not rich have access to fewer of the benefits and suffer more of the discrimination accompanying this late capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy.⁸² And a pedagogical theory grounded in love will and should always be questioned and critiqued. For if the spirit of critique is grounded in a love ethic, it will make the force of love even stronger. It is this love that I want to envision in classrooms, in academic departments, in professional publications, and in the spirit with which academics critique each other.⁸³

In the classroom, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy grounded in the concept of love underscores love

as a yearning to connect with our natural and social worlds in a meaningful fashion [that] can fuel our critical intent to act against

the structures that block an abundant and engaged approach to teaching and learning. . . .With [a] critical capacity, love can disturb and disrupt the reigning order, not in a violent or harmful fashion, but with creative and caring energies. (Liston and Garrison 3)

Creative and caring energies come, at least in part, from enthusiastic theorizing about concrete possibilities. The connections between feminist scholars discussing coalition and political change are far-reaching. The presence of these connections substantiates well my claim that there seem to be many of “us” out there. At this point, although many of us are not discussing pedagogy specifically, we do seem to be seeking substantial theories that can, I believe, lead to constructive, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical practices.

In sum, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical theory is committed to helping learners investigate the social construction of affect; it acknowledges the affective terrain of the classroom and the complexity of individual people’s affective responses in the context of larger United States society. The reality of the social construction of affect is difficult to comprehend, let alone investigate in the personal context of everyday life in and outside the cultural studies writing classroom. Affect continues to be devalued, especially in the educational system. Teachers of writing must be prepared for the negative responses they receive when considering the affective realm in the classroom and with their colleagues. Modeling self-reflexivity is an important response to the resistance they will undoubtedly face.

Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogues must also recognize and share with others the rhetorical characteristics of their work. As teachers of writing, we can develop support for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy by stressing the rhetoricity of language and affect. We can recognize the power of affect in shaping our worldviews and encourage investigations into our personal convictions, as well as affective dimensions of our classroom and professional interactions.

The work of Chéla Sandoval and several other feminist theorists provides strong support for my argument for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy committed to investigating the affective realm. My project involves envisioning connections between these scholars and valuing the theoretical concept of “love as a hermeneutic” in real and everyday ways that make a positive difference in classrooms and academic culture, in general.

No doubt, some will question my project and label it as nothing more than an idealist vision of bright and cheerful classrooms and academic departments. In the following chapter I discuss several critiques of my argument for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy structured with love as a hermeneutic. In addition to considering the potential naiveté that arguing for “love” may connote, I anticipate and address other feminist criticisms of my pedagogical theory. Specifically, I consider the claims that pedagogies based on an “ethic of care” (related closely to love as a hermeneutic) do more to support racism and sexism than to dismantle them. I define several complications of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, not the least of which is that it can end up reinscribing

dominating relations instead of fighting them. I discuss and ultimately problematize the work of contemporary critics who champion love and care as instrumental for social change. Juxtaposing the concept of love with the bitter and violent reality of racism is problematic, to say the least, but perhaps it is this problematic tension that holds the most potential for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that “disrupts our way toward [better] understanding” of the United States white supremacist status quo.

Chapter Five: Problematizing a Theory of Love and a Pedagogy of Care, Dealing with Discomfort

Thus far I have discussed affective of dimensions of whiteness and critical pedagogical theories as they pertain to white students and teachers in the cultural studies writing classroom. This chapter problematizes my argument for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy by addressing potential critiques of my approach and offering a few teaching practices that are helpful for enacting the pedagogy described and advocated. The first major critique of my project involves the appeal to love as part of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Arguing for love in the context of pedagogy is often considered naïve and ineffective; moreover, it may be understood as downright offensive to those who recognize and/or experience in various forms the harsh realities of discrimination in contemporary United States culture. The second critique involves feminist debates over an ethic of care, which I believe can be associated with my discussions of conviction, affect, and Chéla Sandoval's appeal to love as a hermeneutic. Traditionally, feminist theorists who advocate a pedagogy informed by an ethic of care have been class privileged, white women academics. Some feminists posit that an emphasis on an ethic of care works to reinforce white supremacy. Third, some scholars have critiqued women teachers who embrace pedagogy premised on an ethic of care as reifying gender stereotypes. Although I take issue with certain elements of their arguments, in general, scholarly concerns expressed over an ethic of care have been very useful.

After considering these three potential critiques of the pedagogical theory I am offering, I discuss the necessity of anticipating and responding to the discomfort that students and teachers experience in the critical writing classroom. Teachers using critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies are more effective when they carefully consider affective dimensions of the critical classroom, most notably the discomfort and sense of loss that many privileged students experience when they are challenged to examine more critically contemporary United States society and their roles in it (Boler, "Teaching" 127). Educators in the critical classroom can learn to recognize the varied and complex affective dimensions surrounding critical pedagogies and respond to them effectively. I offer pedagogical theories and methods offered by feminist theorists Megan Boler and Audrey Thompson, among others, as important responses to the distinct affective struggles learners encounter in the critical, feminist, anti-racist classroom.

Anticipating Critiques of a Critical, Feminist, Anti-racist Pedagogy

Perhaps because the term love is so vague and amorphous, yet familiar to all in some form or another, it can be both useful and appealing. However, appeals to love as a hermeneutic for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy certainly can also connote the naïve hope for "happy people" and "happy endings." It is true that an appeal to an "ethic of love" or love as a hermeneutic can lead to uncritical, "caring" pedagogies that make students feel good at the

expense of intense social critique. We might question how effective a pedagogy fueled by love as a hermeneutic actually can be for the student who believes that there is no need to work for democratizing social change because “we” already live in an equal society. What does love do for the student who believes there is no such thing as white privilege or sexism? Conversely, what does love do for the student who understands all too well that privilege exists and that it is wielded to her disadvantage day in and day out? What does love do for the teacher who says he just is not “into” thinking about affect or racism; it is not his “cup of tea”? And what does love do for the feminist teacher who enacts anti-racist pedagogy and works with students who live in a culture that encourages them to think of her as another mother, or at least stereotypically feminine (and thus devalued), especially when she discusses affective dimensions in the pedagogical situation?

Many pedagogical theories of care or “love” have been described as reinscribing the very white, middle class, male privilege dynamics they are purporting to disrupt. For example, Audrey Thompson discusses the privileged positions of white, middle-class feminist academics and how those positions often blind them to the complexities of care in the classroom.⁸⁴ The women who argue for an ethic of care often have defined standards for this ethic based on their own experiences of receiving care from their privileged white mothers or from women (and sometimes men) of color who were hired for the job. As such, the dominant cultural group’s definition of “care” becomes the default definition of care for all contexts, and scholars championing an ethic of care “fail to acknowledge and address . . . their political and cultural assumptions”

(Thompson, “Not” 525). Especially in “‘feminine’ accounts of caring, the caring ideal may be treated as generic or as pluralistic, but it is likely to be referenced implicitly to a White-middle-class ethic of domestic well-being” (Thompson, “Not” 529). Thompson argues this point effectively:

[C]aring as it is practiced in White, middle-class homes is part of the fabric of values that has helped to perpetuate classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism; it cannot be treated as a freestanding set of domestic values uncontaminated by the oppressive values of the public sphere. (“Not” 530)

I think Thompson is correct when she argues that default definitions of care have helped to perpetuate race, gender, and class (*et al.*) privilege structures. Indeed, besides Thompson’s discussions, many theorists who argue for an ethic of care seem to overlook that women of color have been compelled to perform nurturing functions for whites (men, women, and children alike) since the institution of slavery in the United States. Today, people of color, especially women of color, still provide an inordinate amount of underpaid and devalued “caring” labor.

One might visualize the caring pedagogue as the unreflective white teacher who raves that she just “‘loves’ all her ‘kids.’” Or as the teacher who believes that if she or he just gives that “disadvantaged” (codeword for non-white or poor or disabled) student a little more care and attention, he or she will adapt magically to the classroom’s uncritical, white privileged status quo. Care along these lines, obviously, is oppressive and condescending. It ignores the various plights of various peoples and imagines the classroom as a kind of “blissful

bubble” where teachers and students “don’t see color” or difference and learn together, somehow magically divorced from the realities of dominance and oppression in contemporary culture.⁸⁵

The concept of “care” in larger society continues to be associated with privileged recipients, nurturing women, and the domestic sphere. Transferred into the realm of academics, some argue that the “performance of care” functions to exploit women teachers who are expected to perform this “emotional labor” more than their male counterparts. Traditionally associated with the devalued realm of care or affect, women are often relegated to the position of “love lover” and selfless emotional laborer. When assuming the role of care-taker in our classrooms, departments, and universities, female teachers often embody maternal stereotypes that reinforce sexist hierarchies. Worsham argues that “maternal nurturance and care” is

an impossible topos for the feminist teacher, one that simply resubmits women intellectuals to the pedagogic authority of dominant discourses that set up the ideology of nurturance for the benefit of men and at the expense of women. (“Going” 238)

Women teachers are compelled to perform caring behaviors that reify sexist stereotypes. Another feminist compositionist, Eileen Schell, considers this issue carefully in her brilliant explication of the lower-class status of and pressures placed on women writing teachers in the academic workforce. Given the now commonplace phenomenon of “channeling” women teachers into part-time and non-tenure track positions, one can see that these “handmaids, wives, mothers,

and midwives . . . [are] a biological and social extension of unpaid, undervalued, domestic labor” (Schell 46, 62). Similar to Worsham, Schell reminds us that “maternal,” or caring, pedagogies do disservice to racial, class, and sexual differences, in effect smothering these differences in the (white—because the majority of teachers are white) mothering arms of nurturance.

There is no doubt that, at this juncture of time and place, nurturing has become a form of devalued cultural capital. Those who are interpellated to perform nurturing behaviors in this society, women (and, by extension, women teachers), are still devalued, even as they perform the majority of this emotional labor. Rhetoric and composition historian and archivist Susan Miller—and others such as Schell and Worsham—have made clear that the field of composition in particular is relegated to the bottom rungs of the ladder in English studies and, since the field is comprised of a majority of women, the teaching of writing is especially devalued (by students and professors, alike). What is more, many of us in composition studies unknowingly tend to maintain this hierarchy by consenting to the Mother/Maid teacher identity that is so often projected onto us. In the predominantly female field of composition, women compositionists act as the base on which the male-identified superstructure of literary studies depends. The sexual division of labor in composition studies further persists, undoubtedly, in the notion of service. Viewed by most English departments as service, the teaching of writing is more tied to pedagogy (which many interpret as the “work” that involves “feminine” emotional labor) while notions of intellectualism and theory are tied to the study of literature (what many view as the reason-based

“play” of male-dominated literary studies) (Miller 41). Men develop “the” knowledge base, and women put it into practice by teaching and serving the (masculinized) intellectual and (feminized) emotional needs of their students, the field of literary studies, the university, and society at large.

Andrea Greenbaum offers an intriguing pedagogical alternative to this dilemma. Advocating what she terms a “bitch pedagogy,” she posits that our job as teachers is to help our students develop critical thinking skills by being assertive in the classroom and by teaching the “art of confrontation and debate” (152-3). She writes,

we have an ethical obligation to model and teach young women agonistic discourse, to teach them not to do what they are socially constructed to do—to yield, concede, make nice, smooth egos, avoid friction, take on the emotional work—but to push, assert, insist, *remove emotionality* and position themselves as authoritatively as possible in order to become critical thinkers, speakers, writers, fully capable of meeting the demands of a democratic society. (159 emphasis added)

The pedagogy that Greenbaum advocates is in line with the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy I advocate. The goal here is to help students think more critically about the worlds around them. However, in order to do this, we must not “remove emotionality,” as Greenbaum suggests we do. Obviously, Greenbaum is well aware of the nature of women’s stereotypical social construction as loving nurturers. I want to contend, however, that the conflation of nurturance and care

with women and mothering is not necessarily helpful, even though it is the image that dominant social forces package up and sell to us on a daily basis. After all, as the commercial goes, “Choosy mothers choose Jif.” Women are deemed inferior if they are not making the right choices in nurturing others. But when people equate nurturing with the maternal they enact a different kind of violence, a categorical violence against a necessary yet neglected component of teaching: a type of nurturing that compels us to work not only with our students on an intellectual level but also with respect for and attention to their (and our) affective states.

While I certainly do not recommend that white teachers enact blindly the stereotypes of soothing, caring, class-privileged white female teachers, I do want to (re)emphasize that, to be most effective, anti-racist teachers *cannot afford* to engage in work that does not acknowledge the affective dimension and the care and conviction that supports learning.⁸⁶ In truth, we engage in a wide variety of behaviors (including asserting, challenging, soothing, redirecting, reassuring, and showing respect) as we argue, debate, and learn together with our students. Even though the danger remains of reifying sexist and racist dominance structures when we adopt pedagogies that look for ways to enact (as well as critique) care and love in the classroom, I believe that finding ways to value and interrogate the affective domain is what will be most effective if we are committed to fostering democratizing social change. For it is the affective investments, as much as the intellectual investments, that support individuals’ attachments to racism, sexism, classism, etc.

What we need, among other things, are

theories of [the necessary social function of] nurturing . . . that help us to think about what will support students, theories that help us envision more responsive and fulfilling relationships, theories that help us to argue for the kinds of institutional changes that must be made in schools, in the workplace, and government so that we can address the pressing needs of students. . . . (Thompson, “Not” 528)

I read Thompson’s call for a theorization of “nurturing” as similar to the variety of feminists’ theorization of coalition I discussed in chapter four. What we need are theories that take into account the complexities (and dangers) associated with “caring” pedagogies. A necessary component of this theorization is the critique provided by feminists who identify the reification of oppressive social ideologies that takes place when teachers—white woman teachers, especially, perhaps—adopt under-theorized pedagogies based on an “ethic of care.”

Dynamics of Discomfort: Strategies for Dealing with Discomfort and a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy

In addition to the arguments about pedagogies of care reifying sexist and racist social structures, another concern is that these pedagogies are ineffective because they are met with such staunch resistance from students and colleagues alike. Privilege often blinds people to the racist, sexist, and classist social realities critiqued by critical pedagogies. In the critical classroom, teachers

and students alike experience discomfort as they challenge themselves and each other to interrogate heretofore unexamined aspects of their everyday lives. In addition to exhibiting anger, denial, and defensiveness as I discussed earlier in this project, many students also experience a distinct sense of loss when their worldviews are challenged.

The pedagogy I am advocating violently disrupts most people's everyday *modus operandi*. As we compel others (and ourselves) to investigate previously unrecognized privilege structures, as we make the familiar strange, we often inspire psychic dissonance and intense "discomfort." Despite (or perhaps because of) its transformative potential, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can be categorized as what Boler terms a "pedagogy of discomfort."⁸⁷ Thompson recognizes discomfort as an integral part of the learning process, as that which creates a possibility for learning in the first place ("Entertaining" 433). Many students have harsh reactions to critical, anti-racist, feminist pedagogy—reactions against the teacher, their classmates and classroom(s), their daily relationships, and, perhaps most saliently, themselves and many aspects of the lives they have led up to the time they entered our classes.

In close contact with a critical pedagogue's professional zeal, students who are unaccustomed to discussing issues of privilege and oppression out loud and in a public forum often experience that zeal as unethical "cultural surgery run amok" (Thompson, "Entertaining" 434).⁸⁸ Given their lack of experience in cultural critique, for many students,

taking ideas apart and putting them back together in

unrecognizable ways threatens a way of life in which they have learned to flourish. Indeed it may seem to violate fundamental values associated with individual freedom, spontaneous self-expression, and straightforward economic and moral agency. (Thompson, "Entertaining" 435)

Because the United States' contemporary white supremacist, sexist, classist privilege structure allows privileged students to avoid the discomfort of seeing, let alone discussing, the oppression that results from their privilege, students experience a challenge to the racist and sexist status quo as a "loss" of something they deserve, something to which they feel they have a right. It is vital to recognize that students who are resistant to critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies attuned to issues of affect may often experience our courses as a threat which leads to loss of self. Burch recognizes that, "a fully developed concept of love in relation to teaching and learning requires that we formulate inquiries that will jeopardize our students' very identities" (87). When the mythical qualities of dominant cultural narratives such as meritocracy, rugged individualism, and the American dream are introduced to students, usually for the first time, students experience the critique of these cultural narratives as a critique of themselves and the lives they have led.

Students in the critical writing classroom who are asking new questions about themselves and the world(s) around them often express intense affective responses that I read as an effort to maintain this sense of self in the face of the dissonance a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy creates. And so, what to do

when faced with the young white male student whose parents are paying for him to go to school yet who does not seem to recognize this privilege? What to do when he exclaims, “I am working hard and earning my education just like anybody else. But when I graduate, I’m going to lose jobs just because I’m a white man. That’s reverse discrimination, and I’m sick of it.”? Many would argue that an ethic of care and a pedagogy informed by love as a hermeneutic just does not “cut it” in a situation like this.⁸⁹

Students often project their defensive and angry responses directly onto their teachers (Samuels 463). After all, we are the ones compelling them to re-examine everyday life—that which seems most normal and natural—and to learn to recognize the horrific reality of discrimination. As I have indicated, the frustration and the dissonance they experience is what will move students to gain new understandings about how the world works and how *they* work within it. The most effective way to implement a pedagogy that educates students who are unaware of or are defensive about their privilege is to continue to be attuned to the affective dimensions that inform these students’ intense responses. We must respect the complexity of their (and our own) affective responses and remind ourselves that the often passionate and/or “angry resistance of those who feel threatened in our classrooms is also a complex cry for recognition and care” (Boler, “Teaching” 120). Discussing the intensity and diversity of the affective responses people have to critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy—discussing these “cries for care” disguised by angry and defensive responses—is a powerful method of responding productively to the tensions that arise in the critical

classroom, and it can lead to thinking and feeling our way to new perspectives about the issues at hand.

I believe that the concept of love as a hermeneutic can become an important part of how teachers approach students and the powerful affective responses they have to critical pedagogy. Love as a hermeneutic can act as a pedagogical “resting place” in the midst of great discomfort—as an overarching principle to support students and teachers despite their discomfort.

Simultaneously, love as a hermeneutic helps students and teachers to continue in the process of challenging themselves and each other in the cultural studies writing classroom. A “pedagogy of love,” as Kelly has phrased it, asks us to be fully present and in the moment with ourselves and our students—in the midst of intense debate (Kelly 166). From this orientation, “[i]n this loving space is also created the opportunity to form new attachments to old sources of love, attachments that bear the mark of responsible engagement for change” (Kelly 166). To create the loving and transformative pedagogical space of which Kelly writes, teachers must invoke “compassion, which is especially crucial for those who feel they are out on a limb” (Boler, “Teaching” 127). Conveying compassion can be as simple as validating our students’ responses. This does not preclude challenging those responses, but before we do we must look past racist or sexist or classist responses and toward the student who, no doubt, is also experiencing great discomfort. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy sees the “whole” student and her or his wholly complicated response. It is this type of sensitivity that can foster productive coalitions, similar to Haraway’s “webs of connection”

and Mouffe's *societas*. It is this type of exchange that supports students and teachers in pedagogical challenges to the dominant and undemocratic social narratives that circumscribe our everyday lives.

Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy requires more than being sensitive to affective dimensions when we are discussing privilege structures with our colleagues or our students or when we are reading our students' responses to those discussions (Boler, "Teaching" 120). Last semester, one white woman student wrote in her final paper that the class had spent much time focusing on inequalities in society, but it had not spent enough time offering solutions to those problems. In truth, as we spend the semester deconstructing the dominant, discriminatory ideologies that we and our students are encouraged to embrace in this culture, and as they grasp the reality of the widespread discrimination that exists, students are often left with an affective disposition of powerlessness. They understand intellectually that one person cannot end discrimination, and they often ask, "What are we supposed to do about all of this, anyway?"

Boler suggests that students who experience extreme growing pains in classrooms that require them to analyze cultural forces they heretofore did not know existed "need something to replace what I am threatening to take away from them" ("Teaching" 126). She suggests that educators incorporate "productive replacements" in their course content to provide a "clear delineation of what will replace the sense of self lost" ("Teaching" 127). For students, as well as for teachers, "productive replacements" include 1) reading first-person accounts of oppressors who learn to recognize their privilege and work to

relinquish it, and 2) discussing the benefits of ending oppression (for not only the oppressed but also the oppressors) (“Teaching” 130).

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy should include teaching towards the hope for democratizing social change. This hope can become its own “productive replacement” for students who are reluctant to take the leap toward transforming their teaching and learning experiences into ones that incorporate challenge, risk, and critical self interrogation. A pedagogy attuned to love as a hermeneutic and to the diverse and often discomfiting affective dimensions of the critical, feminist, anti-racist classroom can assist educators in teaching towards hope. Boler theorizes “critical hope” as that which necessarily (realistically) requires the suspension of certainty or closure. “Our perspectives and vision are partial,” she emphasizes (“Teaching” 131). And we will never completely succeed in helping one hundred percent of our students to learn new lessons about themselves and the world around them. Moreover, teachers must not fall into the trap of neglecting their own affective dispositions and biases. By harboring an openness to change and perspective, however, we can make room for the compassion which can lead to necessary patience with ourselves and our students (Boler, “Teaching” 131). From a more patient, compassionate place informed by love as a hermeneutic we are better equipped to enact critical pedagogies that foster an atmosphere of respect—what some might even call love—for ourselves and our students as learners with ever-present potential for growth. As I have discussed, discomfort is inevitable when we risk ourselves and adopt critical pedagogy; actively reminding ourselves and our students of the

inevitability of this discomfort is part of the process of learning. I would argue that discussions about this discomfort serve as valuable and “productive replacements” in and of themselves.⁹⁰

It is crucial that teachers begin to theorize ways that we can support privileged students and the affective responses they have while challenging them to question previously *unquestioned* perspectives in the critical classroom. In the face of angry and defensive responses, it is rather easy for educators to become defensive themselves. Instead, we can follow Boler’s recommendations and learn to see our students as not just angry and defensive, but also as feeling a sense of vulnerability and loss. Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogues are most effective when they teach with “critical hope” in mind and when they incorporate “productive replacements” into their curricula. These replacements include teaching about the benefits of democratizing social change for all people and highlighting the work of oppressors who have come to recognize and work against their own oppression.⁹¹ Moreover, paying close attention to intense affective responses to our pedagogy—and making those responses a subject of consideration for the classroom—is an excellent technique for helping students to relax enough to learn. Simply put, invoking sensitivity and providing support is an important part of a pedagogy that challenges students to question the dominant, oppressive ideologies they have been constructed to embrace in today’s conservative climate.

Conclusion

Throughout this work I have argued for the necessity of rejecting the traditional, patriarchal reason/emotion split, which continues to stifle our classrooms, our profession, and our society. Educators must work to “blur” this split, to understand that “reason” can never be divorced from the affective realm. By working to understand how reason and affect work in tandem to influence world view, we can encourage our students (and our colleagues) to think in new and more critical ways about how not just thinking but also feeling works to inculcate individuals in racist, classist, sexist (etc.) everyday relations.

United States citizens are embedded in a social structure that discriminates and privileges often simultaneously and at random. Languages of discrimination are communicated daily. One language I am particularly concerned with is one that I have been trained to read, speak, write, and perform throughout my life: the language of white supremacy.

Languages of whiteness are communicated daily by many, perhaps most, white students in the cultural studies writing classroom who fear and deny their skin color privilege. Clinging to the myths of rugged individualism, meritocracy, and the American Dream, they tell and retell the stories they have been told about equality in the United States. Through its overwhelming, lethal, and self-perpetuating silence, whiteness blinds most of them to their own privilege and supports them in their staunch denial of it. Due to their often limited perspectives, young white students resist critical pedagogies that investigate the social

construction of the complex affective states that compel us to embrace the myths of whiteness.

Apathy supports white privilege, and our students exhibit it in dangerous doses. Ensnared in an everyday world that rewards them for their apathy, many white students do not believe a noose is a noose (a hate crime), or, for that matter, that racism exists at all. White privilege structures encourage the self-deception under which many of our white students operate. Embracing “sincere fictions” and engaging in “graceful evasions,” white students unknowingly perpetuate white supremacy, day in and out.

White students become white teachers, and we continue to learn and speak the languages of whiteness that circulate through United States society. Engaging in various forms of white talk, we perceive our students, especially our students of color, as unsophisticated, disadvantaged, or just plain inferior. We cling to the myth of meritocracy and uphold our white students, most notably our financially and educationally privileged white students, by upholding white standards as the standards by which all students should be judged. Valorizing standardized English while dismissing and denigrating other language systems such as African American Vernacular Expression, white teachers maintain social inequities. “Why can’t they just write clearly?” writing teachers implore, unaware of the implications of judging other language systems as “unclear” instead of different. Driven by ignorance and fear of this difference, we pull each other into our offices and speak “underlife conversations” in hushed tones: *“You know how ‘they’ write.”*

We turn our backs on critical pedagogy because it is easier to deny the immense and devastating reality that we live in a white supremacist, sexist, classist, heteropatriarchy than to challenge it; clinging to an illusion of knowledge mastery, white teachers remain hidden in a refuge that allows us to claim we are somehow not qualified to create critical classrooms. There is no knowledge mastery possible in the realm of critical pedagogy. We only come “closer to” being qualified to enact critical pedagogies as we work to gain critical consciousness, and that is difficult business as it means learning about the worlds that exist outside the white norm, admitting our privilege, and sacrificing that privilege by speaking out about it.

White teachers afraid of losing white privilege and status-quo solidarity with their colleagues can spend their careers never leaving white supremacist comfort zones. Critical pedagogy is dismissed. White scholars avoid self-reflexivity about their privileged racial identities and the complex, underlying affective dimensions that support that privilege. White teachers engage in unifying white talk that insulates them from racism’s reality. Smiling, nodding our heads, averting our eyes, and letting racist comments slide, we generate the polite, white “culture of niceness” that quietly and effectively enforces white normativity.

Claiming that classrooms are not the place for politics, white teachers do not realize that our lives are always already political, always already informed by ideologies. We “eat the Other,” fetishizing students of color as representations and proof of multiculturalism and equality. Those of us who do recognize the

white normativity running rampant in our culture often claim a color-blind orientation, which denies the experience of those who are Othered in our society, as well as the privileges of those who are white. Naïvely and uncritically, we strive for “community” and want to believe that we can create classrooms that are “safety zones” insulated from real-world, white supremacist dynamics.

The work of rhetoricians such as Richard Rorty, Steven Mailloux, and Stanley Fish is helpful for thinking about theories that inform critical writing pedagogies attuned to issues of affect. These scholars recognize the complexity and rhetoricity of language and affect. Their work can lead us to reflect on our belief systems and acknowledge that we are motivated by our beliefs—complicated constructions that rely on more than reason. It is our convictions that rule our thoughts and our behaviors. And affect, the complex confluence of feeling and judgment, is that which fuels those convictions.

Taking the risk of being honest with ourselves about our convictions and world views, critical pedagogues can learn to translate that honesty into our pedagogy; we can learn to step down from our isolated platforms and into the messy world of real and heated exchanges between real and diverse peoples. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy “listens” to the affective dimensions of our educational environments. Instead of assuming a singular Truth about racism, sexism, and classism, (or as some might argue a lack thereof), a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy embraces the power of uncertainty by interrogating what we *believe* and assume to be true.

A major aspect of embracing uncertainty is utilizing an inquiry-based, process approach to learning where we can work toward “disrupting” everyday understandings about society and affect. Suspending a sense of closure, a critical, anti-racist pedagogy that values inquiry encourages students to learn to generate thoughtful questions about their everyday lives in terms of previously unrecognized dynamics of privilege and oppression. In the cultural studies writing classroom, students can learn to study affective dimensions surrounding these dynamics and the construction of discriminatory world views.

A critical, feminist anti-racist pedagogy is informed by the lofty goal of inspiring democratizing social change in our own lives and in the lives of our students and colleagues. It is interested in classroom relations and curricula that inspire liberatory learning. Loving and having “critical hope” for positive social change provide us with the orientation we need to settle down to the messy and difficult business of seeing and working toward changing everyday, white supremacist realities. This pedagogical theory is enriched by the work of feminist scholars who appreciate the notion of community but also recognize its dangers. Uncritical “loving,” “caring,” and “hoping” usually equates to uncritical teaching and learning and the reification of discriminatory social relations. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy seeks to acknowledge the affect that informs our lives and to “deconstruct” that affect in an effort to understand its power, its construction, and its potential for moving people toward positive, democratizing, anti-racist social change.

Endnotes

¹See Worsham, “Going” 216.

²I use the term white supremacy in this project to refer to the attitudes, values, and beliefs that support white privilege and dominance in contemporary United States society. “White supremacy” is most often understood as a specific reference to the goals of the Aryan white supremacist movement in the United States and abroad; however, I find the term to be a powerful descriptor of contemporary social relations, in general. Using the term “white supremacy” is a way of highlighting social injustice based on race. “White supremacy” refers to the behaviors of self-proclaimed white supremacists, as well as to “quieter,” more subtle and insidious forms of racism that are not usually identified as white supremacist, *per se*.

³ The project I am outlining here may seem a bit “top-down” in its approach. Individuals are not merely empty canvases on which the vague and amorphous “society” or “culture” paints distinct pictures of power. As Stuart Hall has suggested about the complexity of hegemonic social systems, individuals perpetuate the very hegemonic structures which oppress them and others in varied ways. Indeed, hegemony is best assured through its own mystification. Dominant power/privilege structures remain in place based on people’s unknowing and/or willing consumption and reproduction of the various hegemonic cultural codes in circulation.

Moreover, it is also important to note that merely having access to new insights about mechanisms of privilege and dominance does not ensure the

eradication of inequality, far from it. While one may argue that knowledge is power, knowledge is still not enough to dismantle the inordinately lethal privilege structure that sustains itself through our own complicity. Social change is arrived at slowly, unevenly, and only through persistent struggle.

⁴ For example, a recently updated monograph by prominent cultural studies scholar John Storey barely mentions race privilege and oppression. Authoritative texts such as Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick's *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* contain chapters written by other prominent rhetoric and compositionists, none of whom address issues of whiteness, race, and ethnicity in any comprehensive way. Articles such as Nina Schwartz's "Conversations With the Social Text" argue that it is necessary for students to gain critical consciousness about dominant ideology, yet discussions of race and race privilege are suspiciously absent from her argument. Thus, for white students especially, cultural studies pedagogies can end up valuing the "reading" of culture to the exclusion of emancipatory learning.

⁵ I am referring here to Debra Jacobs' notion of writing process pedagogy (which I discuss later in this dissertation) that can lead students to "interrupt" their everyday understandings and consider alternate perspectives not informed solely by dominant ideology.

⁶ This phrasing comes from feminist political theorist Carolyn DiPalma.

⁷ See Worsham; Boler; Jagger; Damasio; and Livingston and Garrison.

⁸ Notice here a subtle yet persistent feature of whiteness: viewing as detrimental anything that "colors." In addition, this quote demonstrates a what seems to be a

lack of understanding of the complexities of language, most notably its distinctly affective dimensions.

⁹ Again, one may read this approach as a “top down” one that does not allow for any sense or possibility of agency outside that which is prescribed for people by the dominant social order. Critical cultural awareness is vital and often contributes to the mobilization of people working for democratizing social change. However, as I have indicated, it is also true that change comes about slowly and sometimes not at all.

¹⁰ Of course, people who are not white can also benefit from research into white privilege. However, I maintain that it is white people who have the responsibility to learn about their undeserved skin color privilege and work with each other in order to eradicate it. Making the choice to dissociate from that comfortable, invisible privilege in favor of making whiteness an area of investigation for ourselves and our classrooms is not a decision that comes easily. For example, anti-racist whites are often victims of white discrimination, and the “social change work” that anti-racist whites do is often dismissed by other whites as irrelevant or “reverse racism.” However, this is not about the woes of being white; white people have the privilege of never having to choose, or being able to choose, for that matter, to dissociate completely with the comfort of white privilege. Whites will always have skin color privilege, and they will always have the privilege of choosing to ignore it altogether. Moreover, white supremacist ideology does not really allow for the concept or reality of an anti-racist white person. Because whites are so thoroughly ensconced in a social system that consistently rewards

them, they will in a sense *always* be racists. The best we can hope for is to engage in a sort of “anti-racist racism” that works consistently to challenge the white supremacist status quo.

¹¹ Indeed, in order for racism to perpetuate itself, the reality of the privileges it bestows unjustly must be obscured. As such, the concept of white privilege remains disconnected from racism.

¹² A sense of condescension no doubt accompanies this pity for the Othered, the victim of racism. This is an example of one affective dimension of whiteness: pity for the “Other.” Another example is the condescension that results from circumstances attached to white socio-economic privilege. Class-privileged whites often associate the racialized Other fondly with the duties they are compelled to perform so well for them, such as cleaning, cooking, serving, sewing, and manicuring (both fingernails and lawns).

¹³ I realize, of course, that being “tucked in” at night and receiving kisses in the morning are privileges that many whites did not and do not have, either because of issues of class privilege (their parents may have been away at night working or too tired after a day of serving others) or other family dynamics.

¹⁴ There is great potential for essentializing when writing from personal experience. See Joan Scott. In addition, my invocation of the home as a mostly comforting and safe environment can be read as a form of whiteness. According to Thompson, for example, for people of color home becomes a place for learning survival techniques to deal with a white supremacist world. Furthermore, for many women of color, specifically, the notion of “home” has long been

associated with leaving their own homes in order to do domestic labor in white people's homes. See Thompson's "Not the Color Purple."

¹⁵ For more on the culture of "niceness" and its place in the perpetuation of white supremacy, see McIntyre.

¹⁶ See Rothenberg.

¹⁷ Certainly, White supremacy is not one-on-one identical with skin color. For example, many Latino/a/s, Native Americans, and African Americans have white skin color but do not identify as white or necessarily exhibit the dominating behaviors associated with whiteness. Jewish people who have white skin color have only recently identified as "white" before identifying themselves as Jewish. Even though they identify as white, however, Jews are subject to discrimination because of their ethnicity. Poor white people might have skin color privilege, but class status keeps them from reaping the same benefits as financially secure whites. Another example of the complexity of whiteness can be seen in Québec, for example, where my professor Dr. Marilyn Myerson grew up. The Quebecoise who had white skin color were discriminated against when they spoke their native language: when they did not speak English, they were told to "speak white."

¹⁸ For more on the impact of racism on white people, see Bowser and Hunt, Levine-Rasky, Entman and Rojecki, and Stokes Brown.

¹⁹ Beverly Tatum Daniels' educational research is a well-known example of work that relies on theories of white identity formation. Author of *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, Tatum Daniels explores the multiple statuses, or "habits of mind" that white

students possess. Supporting my argument that psychological approaches to the study of whiteness are vital, she suggests that white students are “desperate” for positive images of whiteness.

²⁰ Fine, Weis, Powell, and Wong note that research into whiteness faces the danger of becoming nothing more than wallowing in guilt and denial (xii). For more critiques of whiteness studies, see Clark, as well as Gilyard’s introduction to *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*.

²¹ Ignatiev and Garvey argue that “anti-racism” is not enough to dismantle white supremacy, for the notion of anti-racism assumes “the natural existence of ‘races’” and thus rejects the commonly-held belief among scholars that race is socially constructed. For Ignatiev and Garvey, only “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity” (10).

²² The definition of “Americanism” as specifically “white” is supported by Maher and Thompson Tetrault, who write, “To become White has often been construed as synonymous with becoming truly American” (324). I discuss this issue further in chapter two’s examination of whiteness exhibited by white students who cling stubbornly and with a sense of entitlement to the myth of the American Dream.

²³ An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the construction of most syllabi which utilize an “add-on” approach to diversity; issues of race and ethnicity are tacked on, usually in a small unit at the end of the course.

Otherwise, courses are created from an approach that assumes a white, Western world view.

²⁴ I borrow the term “citizen-subject” from Chéla Sandoval, who uses it in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, her insightful treatise on post-modern society, the consciousness of those who are oppressed, and techniques for enacting democratizing social change.

²⁵ See Ryden for more on the culture of politeness.

²⁶ See Gore.

²⁷ Of course, as Jews (who achieved “white” status only in the last few decades), Catholics, lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, transgendered and questioning students, and many women know, white skin color does not ensure immunity from hate crimes. Indeed, members of the aforementioned groups who have white skin privilege understand well what it feels like to worry about being the victims of hate crimes and experiencing various forms of discrimination on a day-to-day basis.

²⁸ It is important to note that certainly not all white students benefit equally from white privilege structures. Jody Fernandez’s recent dissertation, *The Literacy Practices of Working Class White Women*, discusses the ways in which socioeconomic status or class is often ignored when we study race. David Roediger also traces the history of the making of the American white working class. For another take on whites and discrimination see Dorothy Allison’s *Skin*, a brilliant autobiographical narrative of the severities Allison experienced growing up as a poor, white lesbian girl in the south, brutally abused by the male parent figure in her life. White students experience various and multiple forms of discrimination (sexism, classism, agism, heterosexism, etc.); however, their

power position in United States culture allows them to never have to experience racism. With this lack of experience comes what seems to be a lack of the ability to understand or imagine what racism “does” (to people) in society.

²⁹ As I indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, I address this more fully in chapter three of this work when I shift my focus from white students to white teachers and an examination of the ways that we reinforce white supremacy in the classroom and in the profession in general.

³⁰ All students’ names are pseudonyms.

³¹ It is important to recognize, I think, that it was not only that I was invoking my authority as a teacher at that moment, I was also relying on my white privilege. I was benefiting from whiteness because I had the power to interrupt Theresa and her classmates without being challenged or questioned about my motives, as a person of color most certainly would have been in that same circumstance.

³² With this description I invoke bell hooks’ strategy of describing United States society. Instead of referring simply to a “discriminatory society,” in many of her books bell hooks delineates the oppressive nature of the United States with a string of powerful and accurate adjectives. Perhaps hooks employs these strings of adjectives such as “late capitalist, post modernist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy” (as I do occasionally in this dissertation), because it forces readers to slow down and consider specific discriminatory qualities of a larger, oppressive regime.

³³ See Sandoval.

³⁴ Of course, people of color are not immune to social construction, either. The first African American millionaire in the United States was a woman who created and marketed her own skin-bleaching cream.

³⁵ *Testimony* is an investigation into Nazi Holocaust “surviving victims’, perpetrators’, and bystanders’ ways of responding to the unthinkable historical catastrophe of” the Holocaust (Berlak 131-2).

³⁶ When I think about, it seems as though the only white people I have ever heard who do claim their racism are those who are engaged in progressive, anti-racist work. Unlike self-deceivers, these people understand all too well that whites can’t escape the white superiority complex that comes with living in a white supremacist culture.

³⁷ McIntosh’s work is now a couple of decades old, but the practice of residential segregations remains. According to Bonilla-Silva, the incidence of residential segregation is

almost as high today as it was in the past, [and] is no longer accomplished through overtly discriminatory practices. Instead, covert behaviors such as not showing all the available units, steering minorities and whites into certain neighborhoods, quoting higher rents or prices to minority applicants, or not advertising units at all are the weapons of choice to maintain separate communities. (*Racism Without 3*)

³⁸ McIntosh’s work is well known and often cited by whiteness studies scholars and educational theorists. However, most do not acknowledge McIntosh’s

contribution to increasing awareness of the privilege that accompanies not just white skin color but also heterosexuality in United States culture. Although heterosexual privilege is not the focus of this project, McIntosh's scholarship should be recognized for the valuable contribution it makes to our understanding of heterosexual privilege in addition to white privilege.

³⁹ Bonilla-Silva writes, "Most whites believe that if blacks and other minorities would just stop thinking about the past ... then Americans of all hues could 'all get along'" (*Racism Without 1*).

⁴⁰ Students often claim that racism diminishes with each generation; however, research has contradicted this claim. It is actually non-traditionally aged students who are "more open to diversity and challenge" than younger students (Whitt *et al.* 182).

⁴¹ Common sense tells us that "nice" is not just a perpetrator of white supremacy, however. "Nice" is not necessarily all bad—if it is defined as teachers expressing warmth and understanding in the critical cultural studies writing classroom with the goal of fostering an atmosphere of care and respect. Some critics label pedagogies that work to create a caring classroom atmosphere as embodying a dangerous form of "niceness" that reifies not only white supremacy but also gender stereotypes (when that "niceness" is exhibited by white teachers). However, caring atmospheres can encourage students learn to engage in self-reflection and risk-taking in the midst of challenging and often uncomfortable moments, moments that are bound to occur repeatedly in a classroom driven by

a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. I discuss this issue at length in Chapter five.

⁴² Gail Okawa calls this “graceful evasion” and suggests that as a critical pedagogue she “realized that [her] challenge was to redirect the averted eyes” (124).

⁴³ Although the journal provides evidence of these myths at work in Andrew’s world view, eventually, requiring Andrew to sift through his own experiences in relation to course discussions and readings was one important way that did help him come to a better understanding of systems of inequality and his place within them. At the end of the course, Andrew was able to admit in his final paper to me that there is such a thing as skin color privilege in contemporary society.

⁴⁴ See Ignatiev and Homi and Winant.

⁴⁵ As I indicated earlier, by definition, living as a white person in this culture means gaining privilege through the domination of Others; however, whites are often Othered, as well. That is, even though whites may have skin color privilege, other factors deny them access to other social privileges. Many whites suffer discrimination because they have low socioeconomic status; are women; are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning; are not “able-bodied; are not Christian, etc.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, Audrey Thompson coins the term “color talk” to define language acts that work against white supremacy, unlike “race talk” and “white talk,” which are defined as supporting it.

⁴⁷ Myers cites Morrison’s notion of “race talk,” which is very similar to “white talk,” to support the validity of her research into everyday behaviors that reify racism. Morrison defines “race talk” as the “explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy” (“On”). Myers morphs Morrison’s “race talk” into the term “racetalk.” For the purpose of this project, I use the term “white talk” because it reinforces my discussion of “whiteness” specifically.

⁴⁸ Recently, I received the same type of response from a friend’s daughter, a bright, young, white high school student. When I defined whiteness to her, her immediate reaction was confusion. “Oh, you mean like when it’s okay for black students to have a club but when it’s white students who form a club they get called racists?” My friend and I were shocked by her response, but in another way we weren’t shocked at all. Many white people have significant trouble grasping the concept of research that turns the table on white supremacy and tries to uncover behaviors that support it in contemporary culture.

⁴⁹ Of course, this argument can and should be made for any and all “water cooler” discussions. In other words, as I have argued, it is not just in the realm of academics that people maintain white supremacy. “White talk” reifies white normativity at the water cooler—and at the office coffee pot, the local grocery store, the airport, etc. . . .

⁵⁰ It can be helpful, I think, to think critically about the myth of meritocracy. Although it is often used by whites as an empty justification for the inequality we see around us, the notion of meritocracy is not solely a negative one. In fact, it

might very well be a positive and integral aspect of our teaching lives. Seeing our classrooms as meritocracies is in some instances a vital part of our pedagogy if we do it in the context of recognizing our prejudices and remembering to treat our students fairly and equally.

⁵¹ Of course, prejudice, discrimination, and domination surrounding the issue of standardized English is not solely the domain of white people. For example, Gilyard notes the ways that some black people perpetuate language discrimination as well in his analysis of the film *Higher Learning*. In it, African American Professor Phipps engages in behaviors that support white supremacy by suggesting that his African American student Malik is lazy and does not do his own work. When Malik makes improvements to a paper, Professor Phipps further engages in whiteness by commenting only on surface issues in writing such as Malik's use of standardized English—not the content of the paper (“Higher” 46). In sum, any and all people who judge those who are not fluent in standardized English as somehow inept or inferior are engaging in behaviors that support white supremacy.

⁵² As it stands, though, standardized English is not “agreed upon,” except by those who already wield it and enforce it as the superior language system. While I do not have any easy answers to the issue of educating students in and with the “Master’s Tools,” I think that a first and necessary step is helping educators (especially teachers of writing) to understand that there are issues surrounding language, power, privilege, discrimination, and standardization. Many teachers, white ones especially, do not acknowledge standardized English as

standardized; they continue to view other language systems such as AAVE as error-ridden. Acknowledging these issues among ourselves and in our classrooms is not enough, however. It is vital that we make room for a variety of language systems in the classroom through diverse reading and writing activities. Furthermore, we should reinforce for our students the value in being multi-lingual. By extension, as Young's recent article, "Your Average Nigga," demonstrates, we should make room for this variety in our professional communications and publications, as well.

⁵³ Simultaneously, like their white teachers, privileged white students garner huge benefits in terms of self-esteem at the expense of those who are not fluent in standardized English

⁵⁴ Of course, other teachers besides white teachers turn their backs on anti-racist pedagogy. In truth, enacting an anti-racist pedagogy is perhaps more the exception than the rule in today's conservative climate.

⁵⁵ There are a couple of things to consider here. First, it is not just white teachers with conservative backgrounds who experience discomfort when teaching in diverse classroom settings. Indeed, hooks discusses her lack of preparation for teaching in a racially and ethnically diverse classroom setting. "I had never before been compelled to work within a truly diverse setting and I lacked the necessary skills. This is the case with most educators. ...Hence, [we] are poorly prepared when we actually confront diversity." Discomfort with this difference is "why so many of us stubbornly cling to old patterns" suggests hooks ("Teaching" 41).

In addition, white teachers who do not experience this discomfort embody our white supremacist culture and hooks' notion of "eating the Other" when they are unthinking and uncritical about the safe classroom, the contact zone, and their desire to have "contact" with the Other. As hooks explains it, "it is the ever present reality of racist domination, of white supremacy, that renders problematic the desire of white people to have contact with the Other" ("Eating" 184).

⁵⁶ For more on multiculturalism as "cultural tourism," see Drew, who critiques quite effectively the "non-critical stance taken by many leftist academics when it comes to multiculturalism" (300).

⁵⁷ Of course, it is only a small percentage of young people who even make it into college in this country in the first place. This is another indicator of a white supremacist culture: believing that our classrooms reflect the entire culture, instead of those people who have enough privilege to make it to college.

⁵⁸ We cannot, however, fault only the teachers who choose to take the "easy way out" and avoid critiquing white privilege and racism in the writing classroom. The consistently increasing corporate influence in higher education today obviously supports white normativity at our every turn. Huge white-person-owned corporations offer internships and scholarships to our students, often eliminating their chances of studying subjects and pursuing interests other than capitalistic ones. At many colleges and universities we walk across our campuses daily and buy our meals from minimum-wage earning non-white employees behind the counters at Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and Burger King. Moreover, our universities

require our students to perform to certain standards on tests like the GRE, which as we know lines the pockets of many while simultaneously discriminating against those not raised in dominant white, Christian, middle-class culture. Recent moves to eliminate basic writing courses from four-year schools across the nation are further evidence of the privileging of student citizens, non-whites and whites alike, whose home languages or communication styles are different from privileged white people's standardized English.

Furthermore, given the situation of most educational institutions today, teachers have legitimate reasons to fear for their jobs when teaching about white privilege in the writing classroom. As the predominant number of writing teachers are adjuncts, women nonetheless, job security is always already an issue. Material circumstances dictate our lives, and the reality that jobs are on the line can be enough to dissuade educators from taking the risks of engaging students in rigorous and difficult critique of themselves and social structures that maintain and reinforce white privilege.

On a related note, since the vast majority of writing teachers are adjuncts, generally they have less time for and access to vital research which challenges the dominant racist social order. There is a problem when the majority of teachers who teach a broad cross-section of students does not have time or money to access the critical race scholarship that is so important for all learners—students and teachers alike.

⁵⁹ I realize that asking students to introduce themselves and pronounce their own names is not a panacea for many white teachers' lack of familiarity with non-European names; however, it is a start for teachers who want to model respectful behavior. Furthermore, asking students to introduce themselves gives them opportunities to hear themselves and each other speak out loud in class which may lead to more class participation later in the semester.

⁶⁰ See Althusser.

⁶¹ Olson anticipates several potential dangers of the cultural studies pedagogical project. If cultural studies claims that it has a corner on the market of studying cultural ideology, if it claims that it

will somehow lead to a clearer perspective on the world, cultural studies is in effect asserting its own superiority over all other disciplines. . . . Elevating one discipline above all others is not only an instance of inexcusable academic hubris, it is clearly misguided. [F]or similar reasons, the attempt to unify all knowledge in one master field is destined to fail. (19)

⁶² See Gore.

⁶³ One of the main challenges of engaging in self-reflexivity is finding a way to negotiate our sense of identity and self as we challenge our students to do the same. This is no easy task, for teachers and students have to "live" with themselves while continually critiquing themselves. In light of this, self-reflexivity can be discomfoting, to say the least. I discuss this discomfort in terms of pedagogy at some length in the following chapter where I argue that "disruption"

of quotidian consciousness is a central component of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Detached, intellectual investigation just doesn't, in my opinion, always cut it. Teaching attuned to "passion" is what can. See Mirochink and Sherman's *Passion and Pedagogy*.

⁶⁴ The term public intellectual, although perhaps lofty and certainly contestable, is useful for understanding the way academics envision the productive, democratizing work of learning/teaching. Following Gramsci, I define a public intellectual as committed to engaging in (often) rebellious and (hopefully) productive critiques of society.

⁶⁵ See Albrecht-Crane, Boler, Crawford, Langstraat, West, and Worsham.

⁶⁶ I like Thompson's definitions of relationships being created when people "do things together," such as in the classroom ("Entertaining" 432).

⁶⁷ Liston and Garrison recognize the neglect and even disrespect shown by academics toward the realm of affect in terms of their work and the profession. Referring to the untapped power of theorizing complicated and often empowering notions of love and affect in academic culture today, they argue that "[l]ove, as a concept has seemed terribly suspect, irrational, somewhat out-of-bounds, and a bit too unwieldy. . . .Rarely have modern scholarly analyses seemed adept at handling the stuff of feelings . . ." (4).

⁶⁸ Dimensions of class privilege are another factor to consider when discussing relationality. Deeply entrenched privilege structures support the class-privileged educator's ability to ignore the reality that class privileged students have access to more "training" which schools them to "feel" and "relate" in certain ways

deemed more “appropriate” in the classroom (See Boler’s *Feeling*). Economic privilege is also further complicated in terms of the dynamics of racism. People of color are automatically associated with poverty in this culture. Conversely, poor whites are often considered “white trash,” a label that is becoming more common in everyday use. The term “white trash” discriminates against poor white people, as well as those who aren’t white. In fact, the term “white trash” serves to reinforce racism. “White” trash implicitly codes non-whites as inherently pre-disposed to being “trash,” or poor. Using the word “white” allows lower class whites to secure their race privilege, thus reinforcing white supremacy.

⁶⁹ In terms of pedagogy, making “truth statements” means, among other things, describing and examining the distinctly material aspects of our everyday lives. Materialist feminist theory is especially helpful in leading educators to ground their scholarly inquiries in a concrete examination of power and its effects on various people, especially on those who are Othered in United States society (See Hennessy and Ingraham). For example, teaching and learning about race in contemporary United States society must involve an examination of how social power dynamics are made manifest—how they are played out—in the people’s everyday lives. It is not sufficient to tell our classes that white supremacy exists in our everyday interactions; instead, we must look at *how* whiteness denies and bestows on people distinct advantages and disadvantages (e.g., in salaries; in formal (and informal) hiring and promotion policies; in the ability to hail a cab; or in the ability to walk safely in certain neighborhoods, etc.

⁷⁰ This is particularly relevant to people and their positions of power in United States society. How do people wield that power in order to create and enforce certain language systems? For example, class and educationally-privileged white people enforce standardized English as the dominant language of communication and commerce. Obviously, as I discussed in chapter three, this is an especially important issue for consideration and discussion in the cultural studies writing classroom.

⁷¹ As Fish suggests, “you can never say the thing (because there is no such thing) that is in and of itself irresistible, conclusive, and definitive, now, tomorrow, always” (Fish xviii).

⁷² Indeed, Sandoval writes: “My contribution is to identify a hermeneutics of love that can create social change” (136).

⁷³ Sandoval’s text focuses on emancipatory methods used by those who are oppressed in United States society, thus the terminology “methodology of the oppressed.” Sandoval’s explication of the methodology also reveals crucial insights for people who experience more privilege than oppression. No doubt, the language she uses and the theoretical concepts she invokes are not easily accessible; however, the “ideological forms” that Sandoval defines and the concept of love as a hermeneutic that she invokes reveal critical insights for educators who use critical pedagogies. The “methodology of the oppressed” can be instrumental for a pedagogy that challenges variously privileged students and teachers to acknowledge and come to terms with their own privileges. With

Sandoval's work comes pedagogical possibility for working toward democratizing social transformation.

⁷⁴ Sandoval's invocation of Barthes' semiotics relates well to studying the variety of ideological state apparatuses outlined by Louis Althusser. In other words, part of the "methodology of the oppressed" that can be translated to the critical classroom is an analysis of the dominant ideologies that inform various cultural sources (apparatuses) such as the media, the military, and familial, governmental, educational, and religious institutions. Sandoval's "methodology of the oppressed" allows for an examination of dominant economic ideology as well, most notably its power to "infiltrate" the consciousness of individuals to the point that, according to Herbert Marcuse, "the political needs of society become individual needs and aspirations [and] their satisfaction promotes business and the commonweal" (xli).

⁷⁵ Identifying the forms as "ideologies" is a straightforward, ethical, and effective approach which serves an important educative function: it helps us to remember and/or see the constructed, situated, consistently ideological nature of all perspectives, therefore enriching the critical inquiries we make and the critical stands that we take.

⁷⁶ For example, data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has indicated for decades now that white men earn more money for the same work performed than do men of color; white women earn less than white men and men of color; and women of color earn the least of all.

⁷⁷ See Spivak.

⁷⁸ Feminist theorists Bernice Johnson Reagon and Noël Sturgeon also consider the power of coalitions and coalition politics in effecting democratizing social change in a variety of contexts.

⁷⁹ I am referring here to revolutionary educator and political activist, Paulo Freire, who argued for education's place in the empowerment of oppressed peoples.

Andrea Greenbaum refers to a "melody of Freirean emancipation" in the Introduction to her edited collection *Insurrections: Approaches to Teaching Resistance* (xiii) .

⁸⁰ I borrow here from Haraway's reference to "freedom projects" in *Modest Witness* (269).

⁸¹ See hooks' *Yearning* as well as *Teaching to Transgress* for more work centered on the theme of *yearning* for democratization.

⁸² See Lorde.

⁸³ Furthermore, this love must be made manifest in the everyday lives of all citizen subject-agents, for it implicates many more than just those individuals working in academe. This love nourishes progressive political coalitions of all peoples working for democratizing social change. Indeed, a problematized and political love can work to inspire new, better, and more direct action that brings about democratizing social change.

⁸⁴ Although this chapter focuses on critiques of pedagogies of an ethic of care that reify racism and sexism, it is important to think about the class-based dimensions of care that assure that "the eros of affluent citizens, their emotional and civic potential, is positively cultivated, while the eros of poor citizens, their

emotional and civic potential, is institutionally suppressed” (Burch 86). As I have tried to illustrate, “love” becomes a positive and encouraged attribute for the “haves.” For the “have-nots,” however, there is less time and space for the luxury of enjoying loving homes and loving school environments.

⁸⁵ I refer here again to the notion of “color-blind racism” as put forth by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.

⁸⁶ For more discussion on the phenomenon and ramifications of “soothing the egos” and “tending the wounds” of our students, see Bartky’s *Femininity*.

⁸⁷ See Boler’s *Feeling Power*, a fascinating examination of the United States educational system’s role in controlling and manufacturing emotions.

⁸⁸ Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is not unethical. In fact, I would suggest that it is a “loving,” supportive, and socially responsible pedagogy because it challenges and simultaneously supports learners to continue in their inquiries (despite the difficult affective responses they may be experiencing) with the goal of learning about social structures and enacting democratizing social change.

⁸⁹ Boler provides her readers with a thorough analysis of the emotional investments students hold, and she also offers an explanation of her notion of a “pedagogy of discomfort” that can help students investigate and challenge those investments. In addition, Boler’s work considers the pedagogue’s perspective, revealing the inevitable frustration (indeed “suffering”) teachers deal with as they experience their students’ reticence to engage in rigorous and often painful self critique. Boler demonstrates the value in observing our “own sites of attachment to another’s change” (“Teaching” 126). I remember my first semester of teaching.

Not used to the countless hours of class preparation and as a slower grader than I am now of student compositions, it seemed I spent all my time engrossed in my teaching. At night, I would lie in bed and agonize over my students and their progress or what I perceived as a lack thereof. Finally, I learned to visualize a file folder for each student. As I mentally closed each folder, I relaxed enough to let go of my worry over their growth and my performance. Today, some ten years later, I still find myself occasionally using that trick. Boler's honesty about the psychic space her students sometimes take up in her head is validating.

⁹⁰ In addition to discussing the variety of intense responses students have surrounding our critical pedagogy, Boler posits that engaging in behaviors as simple as smiling can and does make a major difference for students who inevitably struggle with critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies.

⁹¹ For example, whiteness studies scholars have published articles that detail their own processes of coming to consciousness about their privileged position in United States society's racist status quo. See Clark and O'Donnell.

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