UNMASKING WHITE COMPLICITY/ INNOCENCE:
CRITICAL WHITE STUDIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
RETHINKING SCHOOLING

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the literature in the field of critical White studies and explore the pedagogical implications for rethinking schooling. I argue that an interrogation of Whiteness is vitally important to informing anti-racism theory and praxis. As White educators our task is to dismantle the pervasive power of Whiteness to define normalcy in our educational institutions. This entails a rigorous and critical problematization of Whiteness as systems of domination that not only marginalize racialized “Others” but unfailey privilege Whites. I analyse processes of transforming Whiteness through deconstructing White positionality and Eurocentric hegemony. Developing a White anti-racist consciousness involves probing our own complicity in White supremacy/racism to see how we have been affected by histories of colonialism and imperialism and are vested in systems of power and privilege. In transforming schooling, space must be created for critical pedagogies of Whiteness within an integrative anti-racism framework.
Acknowledgements

I remember not long ago, before I began studying at O.I.S.E., a friend invited me to attend an evening class which was to be given by some of the students in Bud Hall’s participatory education course. I remember vividly those first few moments of that class because they were cathartic for me, although I was unaware of it at the time. The class was already in progress when I arrived, as I was held up by unpredictable Hamilton-to-Toronto traffic. Hoping to slip in unnoticed, I sat near the back of the room, and settled into my seat, while surveying the room to find my friend. My eyes no sooner spotted her near the front of the room when I was asked by the woman organizing the evening’s events to introduce myself and to say a few words about why I was there. Nervously, after taking a deep breath, I said that I was seeking change in my life, both on a personal and a professional level and so I had come with my eyes, my ears, and my heart open. I didn’t realize then that this experience and those words, simply spoken but deeply felt, would lead me to return to university life, after a long absence, as a part-time M.A. student, and to eventually find the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education.

I think that sometimes as teachers we undervalue the power we have to influence students’ lives. It is for this reason that I want to mention some of the educators at O.I.S.E who have given of their time and who have influenced me and my classroom practice in significant ways. To Tara Goldstein: Your open heart, vibrant energy, and steadfast commitment to students and to anti-discriminatory education aided my transition into university life immeasurably. I have a huge respect for you because you exemplify for me a White woman who lives her beliefs and incorporates her values into her daily practice. To my supervisor, George Dei: I feel indebted for all that I have learned about anti-racism education through attending your classes and reading your published works. I remain in awe of your fortitude, your huge intellect, and all that you know. I admire your ability to write and publish and engage in
activism and still “be there” for students. I know that the relationship that develops between a White student and a professor of colour is a “trust walk”. I would like to earn your trust. I thank you for your time and your encouragement. To Roy Gillis: The moment you introduced yourself to your students as a gay man was for me very powerful and affirming. You’ve inspired me to speak openly about gays and lesbians in my classroom. And lastly to Judy Isaac Barnes: in the hectic pace of university life, I thank you for your words of encouragement that came at a time when I was feeling very uncertain about myself and my abilities. These acts of kindness are not forgotten by the heart.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ iii

Chapter 1: Mapping the Terrain of Whiteness: White Silencing in Education............. 1

What Brings Me to the Topic......................................................................................... 5

Positioning Myself in Anti-Racism Work............................................................... 9

The Problem of Study................................................................................................. 12

My Discursive Framework......................................................................................... 14

Summary of Chapters................................................................................................. 16

Clarifying Terms........................................................................................................... 17

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Eurocentric Hegemony.................................................. 24

Whiteness as Constructed Normativity.................................................................... 25

Whiteness at Work in Our Everyday Lives............................................................. 30

White Privilege........................................................................................................... 31

Systems of Interlocking Privilege and Oppression................................................ 33

The Discursive Power of Whiteness......................................................................... 34

The Ideology of Whiteness at Work in Our Everyday Lives.................................. 37

Whiteness as Terror..................................................................................................... 40

Chapter 3: Whiteness as a Project of Possibility...................................................... 43

The Race Traitor Project............................................................................................. 45

The Process of Transformation.................................................................................. 49
Chapter 1

Mapping the Terrain of Whiteness: White Silencing in Education

While Canadian schools continue to be administered and taught by a largely White, middle-class body of educators, the students who occupy classrooms reflect the growing diversity of the Canadian population and vary widely in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, and sexual orientation, as well as other axes of difference. Rarely, however, is this existing reality questioned by White educators. Most, in fact, would view this state of affairs as normal, and natural because our privilege and dominance remain invisible to us. “The site of whiteness...is one where privilege and dominance seem normal, its structures invisible and its understandings and practices unmarked and unnamed” (Arbor, 2000, p. 56).

The school curriculum is also taken for granted by most White educators; it is perceived as a neutral body of knowledge, devoid of values, beliefs and historical perspective, presented as rational and reasoned truth and as benefiting all students, regardless of their differences. This curriculum, however, is White and Eurocentric; it is grounded within a White, patriarchal, heterosexist, middle-class system of values, and is tied in complex ways to the interests and ways of knowing of the West.

“Our schools, colleges and universities continue to be powerful discursive sites through which race knowledge is produced, organized and regulated” (Dei, 2000, p. 11). Eurocentric power has the authority to name, and legitimize the stories of the dominant as sanctioned knowledge while the stories and knowledges of the minoritized are silenced and invalidated. Academic knowledge produced in schools reflects the discursive power of Whiteness to define itself in benevolent terms and make ethnocentric assumptions about the “Other” that are deeply destructive and offensive to the minoritized. Dei states, “Racialized tropes deployed in the social construction of racialized identities and the representation of marginalized bodies as
racial 'other' are heavily encoded in prevailing ideologies that maintain the validity of conventional academic knowledge. The academic ideologies have become powerful mechanisms of control as conventional ideas produce material consequences” (p. 11).

Much has been written about the inadequate response of multicultural education to the issues of racism and the system of interlocking oppressions in the Canadian educational context. Issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and economic inequality are still rendered silent under this approach. The multicultural agenda is not concerned with current power relations or institutional racism, rather it views the source of the problem with racism as lying in the attitudes of individuals and seeks change in this direction. This approach emphasizes cultural celebrations and cultural sensitivity to the “Other” which in fact, contribute to the reification of culture and racialized tropes - thus, Whiteness remains at the center and the status quo is maintained.

Anti-racism education, on the other hand, is driven by the goal of educational transformation and societal change. Anti-racism education is an action-oriented approach to education that seeks to rupture the existing power relations by countering White supremacist curriculum and educational policies and practices. Thus, its agenda is very political. It seeks to interrogate positions of dominance and privilege and to probe what Frankenberg (1993) has called the colour evasive and power evasive positioning of Whiteness. Relationships of power are critically explored as they are played out in history and in a contemporary context. Marginalized and oppositional knowledges are produced and brought into the center to counter the Eurocentric academic knowledge base. “In order for anti-racist education to become a focal point in our education system, the society of which the system is a part must be radicalized. This observation means that the overall argument for anti-racist education posits the challenge for transformation on those who now hold the power” (Walcott, 1990, p. 110).

In this thesis, I argue that anti-racism educational change requires White educators to see
that the Canadian educational system perpetuates a culture of White superiority and domination, that the pursuit of knowledge is deeply imbedded in multiple layers of imperial and colonial practice and that there exists pervasive silencing about White supremacy/racism. The power of Whiteness to assume a natural, neutral, and hidden position that prevents it from being scrutinized needs to be exposed (Dyer, 1997). As White educators we need opportunities to interrogate Whiteness - not to study other ethnic groups - and to critically think through issues of culture, race cognition, and White supremacy/racism. We need opportunities to examine our own multiple positions in relation to privilege and oppression, to become aware of the significance of our own radicalized selves and to critically reflect on the implications of our racial positioning for rethinking schooling. The development of progressive, anti-racist identities through an exploration of the liberatory possibilities of whiteness requires careful consideration of the process involved in transforming Whiteness so that we work for equity and social justice. As Yudice has stated, “Whites must feel that they have a stake in the politics of multiculturalism and not simply see themselves as a backdrop against which subordinated groups take on their identity” (1995, p. 280).

While my thesis is supported by anti-racist educators in the Canadian context and critical multiculturalists in the American context, it is not readily and warmly embraced by most Whites, and in fact quite the opposite is true. Most Whites experience anger, hostility, and defensiveness in the face of their own tremendous denial, negation, and erasure of racism (Dei, 2000). Furthermore, most Whites working within the educational system view racism to be “a thing of the past.” From trustees to classroom teachers, there exists a common sense assumption that our school system is fair and equitable for all students and that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed. “There is a deep attachment to the assumption that in a democratic society individuals are rewarded solely on the basis of individual merit and that no one group is singled out for discrimination” (Henry & Tator, 1994, p. 2).

Even in the face of mounting evidence - academic, empirical studies, the findings from
government task forces investigating racism - the pervasiveness of White supremacy/racism is dismissed and/or denied. When minority students have difficulty learning, or drop out of school, those in authority view their failures as being due to their own, or their families’ difficulties. Seldom do those in authority view educational institutions as part of the problem (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, Zine, 1997; Fine, 1991). People of colour, on the other hand, can speak personally to the difficulties and oppressiveness that surviving a White school system has entailed for them and view this as business as usual in a White-dominated, race-conscious society. Henry and Tator state:

This conflict between the ideology of democratic liberalism and the racist ideology present in the collective belief system of the dominant culture creates a dissonance in Canadian society. There is a constant and fundamental moral tension between the lived reality and everyday experiences of people of colour and the perceptions and responses of those who have the power to redefine that reality, such as politicians, bureaucrats, educators, judges and journalists, the corporate elite and others. While lip service is paid to the need to ensure equality in a pluralistic society, in reality individuals, organizations and institutions are far more committed to the maintenance of the status quo in order to maintain or increase their power” (1994, p. 2).

I write this thesis for all people - people of colour and Whites, both academics and non-academics, educators and non-educators alike, knowing that everyone can benefit from these discussions and debates on Whiteness. I also believe that bridges need to be built between academia and the wider community and so efforts to make knowledge accessible to all people motivates my writing. However, I want to clearly state that I direct my message and my arguments to us, as White people, and particularly to those Whites involved in education - the classroom teacher, the trustee, the school principal, who largely continue to say that racism is a thing of the past and no longer exists. I include in this collective group, people who like myself, desire to deepen their anti-racism theory and praxis. In this respect, my writing is very personal and is as much about my own transformation and growth as it is about discovering the liberatory possibilities that exist in Whiteness for all of us. My hope is that I write with a measure of humility and humbleness and yet, I acknowledge that I attempt to
persuade, to argue with passion and conviction that it is crucial for us, as Whites, to critically examine ourselves, as multi-positioned White subjects, and our educational institutions that promote hegemonic knowledge and ways of being. I am calling for a critical and honest examination of the oppressive dimensions of both ourselves and our schools for those who fall outside of the parameters of normativity, and whose lives are defined by difference, recognized as "...the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, culture and religion" (Dei, 2000, p. 34).

Having said this, I caution that we should not fall into the trap of villainizing White people. This is not my intention. An interrogation of Whiteness must involve a critical questioning of the ways we, ourselves are implicated and invested in a raced, gendered, and classed society. This self-reflective process begins with addressing claims of innocence and moral distancing to unmask our complicity and responsibility, both personally and collectively in White racism. My position is reflected in the words of African-American cultural critic and writer, hooks, “There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures” (1989, p. 118).

**What Brings Me to the Topic**

Many people are curious as to “what brings me” to the topic of Whiteness and show genuine surprise when they see the passion I have for anti-racism education. I believe this is because of the pervasive normalization of Whiteness. Members of the White/dominant group remain unaware of the significance of their racial positioning in terms of power and privilege. Also, because of the emphasis under multicultural education on celebrations of cultural difference (songs, dances, and festivals), White peoples’ focus has always been on understanding the racialized “Other”, albeit in stereotyped ways, and not where it needs to be, on understanding ourselves, and White supremacy/racism.
I would like to relate a bit of my own personal history, for two reasons: first, it is a way of introducing my subjective self and secondly, I believe it is important for White people to share, honestly, and openly, some of the experiences that facilitated their transformation. Many of us who are developing an anti-racist consciousness have been entrenched in the values, belief systems, privileges, histories, experiences and modes of operation of Whiteness all of our lives. I worry, as other White people do, that I will say something that exposes my ignorance, my racism. But I worry even more about falling into complacency, and not engaging in the struggle of transforming schools into spaces for equity and social and racial justice. It is with this in mind, and not any need for self display, that I would like to share briefly my own journey of racial awareness and activism.

My own awareness of myself as a White person crystallized in my teen years which was during the height of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. I find this interesting in light of Winant’s statement that Whiteness is a relational concept and is unintelligible without reference to non-Whites (1997, p. 48). One of my fondest memories is of my sister and I doing dishes together after the family meal and singing Civil Rights protest songs. I remember the solidarity I felt for the Black struggle against segregation as we watched the mass protests and demonstrations and listened to the fiery speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X on television. I consumed books in the library having to do with slavery, segregation, and the Black struggle for justice.

In spite of the affinity I felt for the Black struggle for freedom and justice, my own experience of growing up in an all White family, in an all White working class neighbourhood, and attending an all White school, meant that everything I learned, saw, heard, and absorbed taught me racism. As children we played cowboys and Indians, and were called ‘wild savages’ when we were too noisy. In school we learned that Christopher Columbus discovered America, that Indians were warlike savages, civilized by the White man. We learned about people from far away lands as we became voyeuristic tourists experiencing the “Other” in
stereotypical ways through the lens of the colonizer. In this way, we were taught to accept White supremacy/racism as our dominant worldview.

When I traveled to Europe as a young adult, I stepped out of my totally WASP environment, although having internalized it, it continued to plague me. I have an embarrassing memory of a newly made friend, an American Jewish girl I met on an Israeli kibbutz, sitting with me at a war memorial one hot afternoon in East Berlin. In a moment of contemplation, she sat head in hand, silently mourning the loss of millions of Jewish people. I got up to buy cigarettes from the vending machine close by, put in my deutsch marks but received nothing back in return. “I’ve been Jewed!” I shouted to her. She looked painfully back at me and I, apologizing, knew that something was very wrong as my racist upbringing smacked me directly in the face.

My earliest experiences of being aware that I was the recipient of White privilege came from a year of traveling with my husband in Asia. The experience was one of stepping into privilege overnight and is not unique to us but rather is “part of the colonial remnants” (Kidder, 1997, p. 165). In China, when we waited to board trains, we were frequently put at the front of the line ahead of the Chinese people. Once on the train we were always able, through persistence, to obtain a “hard sleep”, a birth on the train. Most of the Chinese riders would experience their lengthy train travel on a crowded hard bench. Upon entering a doctor’s office in a large Chinese city, my husband was treated right away without waiting. These experiences, among others, led me to reflect on the way our lives were valued above the lives of the Chinese people. An interesting aside to this story is that two young Chinese-American girls had the opposite experience. Being mistaken for mainland Chinese citizens, they were treated as such and experienced the harsh travel conditions of the Chinese people. Although White privilege is something I felt, and reflected on during this year of travel, it is not something I openly spoke about until I read McIntosh’s 1988 article on White privilege in the early 1990s.
I began to develop what I could call “critical consciousness” about race issues during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. At that time I joined a volunteer group of people, some White, and some Middle Eastern, who were outraged at the United States’ attack on Iraq. We were appalled at the official racist rhetoric broadcasted by the mainstream media which demonized Saddam Hussein and made the brutal killing of thousands of Iraqi people seem inconsequential and totally justified. We were disheartened by the way racism was so easily and quickly drawn upon among the populous thus enabling the United States, Canada and the Western world, to achieve their imperialist goals. Over a two-year span we developed a high school resource kit on the Persian Gulf War to expose the lies, rhetoric, and destruction to the Iraqi people and land. We shared the common vision that classrooms should be spaces for analyzing war, oppression, and exploitation.

But our project was not without internal strife and conflict. I worked with a Palestinian women to develop a section of the resource kit on anti-racism. Neither of us had an academic background in anti-racism education or critical race theory. In addition, there was no one in the group who understood what this section of the kit should look like. One of the issues that quickly became a source of conflict for me was my Whiteness. It was pointed out to me, by both people of colour and White people we consulted, that I had no authority to write about racism as a White woman. This plunged me into a state of internal conflict and a search to understand what my role should be in working to eradicate racism. In addition, someone in the group wanted to use the term White supremacy and not racism. Many of us worried that this term would “turn off” White teachers and we did not want to use it. This led one member, a Palestinian man, to angrily leave the group. The conflict and confusion about the anti-racism section did not abate, however, and resulted in the coordinator of the group, a White woman, deciding to exclude it completely from the resource kit.

This was a painful experience for me but one which led me to engage in serious critical self-reflection and to dig deeper into the issues of White supremacy/racism. In this sense, the
experience was a genesis because it was the beginning of my search to understand not only White supremacy/racism in a more indepth way, but also to grapple with how I was positioned within anti-racism work. Obviously, good intentions and the passion I felt were not enough, as key issues needed to be understood, in terms of where I fit into the anti-racism struggle as a White woman. Through reading, studying, and engaging in critical discussions on Whiteness and anti-racism education, I began the process which continues to this day, of seeking to understand what I could do, and speak, and write about in this area of study. Anti-racism education was for me connected to what I was all about as a person and exemplified my beliefs and values, it connected me to deeper parts of myself - to the core of my being. I realized that this was not the kind of energy that could be ignored by either myself or others, that could be silenced, although this was becoming a common experience, or that I could put neatly away in a box.

Positioning Myself in Anti-Racism Work

So then how can I speak about my position in anti-racist work as a White woman, feeling my passion, on the one hand, and knowing that we are all differently positioned in relation to systems of domination, on the other? I believe that I must begin by acknowledging that as a White woman I have power and am privileged on many sites - heterosexual, educator, middle class, although of working-class roots, able-bodied. But as Arber expresses, “Positioning is not about idle namings. It is about relationships of power as they are played out within conditions of history” (2000, p. 58). In addition, “there is a direct relationship between “experience” and “worldview” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 5). I come to know about White supremacy through my experienced location as a White woman, a member of the dominant and through my connection to the historical legacy of racism. I am connected to White histories of colonialism and imperialism and have been schooled, both formally and informally within a Eurocentric worldview.
Further to this, if positioning is also about one’s politics, about what one believes in and cares about, then I need to state unequivocally that I am a White woman, an educator and an anti-racist activist. I am also a single parent, the mother of two teenage children who are students in the educational system. These are the voices that emanate from my heart, my soul, and my mind, the driving force that determines who I am and what I do, and that propels me forward in my work - even as I hope to grow and expand and become more of who I desire to be.

When my passion and my politics are put aside, however, when I meet and greet people in the outside world, what I return to is: White woman - heterosexual and able-bodied educator. This is the social currency I am privileged with every waking day of my life. There are obstacles to be navigated, of course, to do with patriarchy - hurdles I have to jump - but my Whiteness is what I share in common with the dominant group and what gives me more resources and power than people of colour. Scheurich states, “Middle and upper-class White males, nonetheless, consistently reap the most benefits and have done so for a very long time within Western culture. The results of this historical dominance is that the styles of thinking, acting, speaking, and behaving of the dominant group have become the socially correct or privileged ways of thinking, acting, speaking, and behaving” (1993, p. 7). The ways of the dominant White group are universalized; they provide the White yardstick against which everyone is measured: correct grammar, hiring criteria, and appropriate behaviors, for example, are all determined by social group membership (p. 7).

Scheurich (1993) has a very refreshing, yet sobering message for those of us, anti-racist Whites who get carried away by our indignant anger toward other Whites and perhaps yeild to the temptation to view ourselves as politically correct, and morally superior to those Whites who are not involved in this work. He argues that there is no claim for special status for those of us who are doing anti-racist work and that it is less than honest to think that because we are doing anti-racism work we are any less affected by our White privilege. Our positionality
requires us to not only recognize our privilege based on our racial location but also, our White racism. His main point is that no matter how much we, as anti-racists fight White racism, we cannot escape being White. He states, “... in our society everyone is racially located and experiences the inequitable distribution of resources and power by racial group, even though a belief in individualism conceals this inequitable distribution. It does not matter whether we are a “good” or a “bad” White; all Whites are socially positioned as Whites and receive social advantages because of this positionality. No individual White gets to be an exception because of his or her antiracism” (p. 9).

This fundamental contradiction between being White, and the direct recipient of race privilege, on the one hand, and being anti-racist, on the other, is, I believe, a necessary reality check for us, White people. As White people, we enter into the anti-racism struggle through the interrogation of Whiteness. Arber reminds us that “... a first task is to understand ourselves” (2000, p. 45), and how we experience ourselves as nonracialized individuals, so that we cannot see our own racism. This must be our starting point. The deconstruction of Whiteness - the dissecting, probing, and jarring whiteness open for examination - deepens our understanding of how it functions as a system of domination both outside and within ourselves. Finding the courage and the conviction to become intimately acquainted with the oppressor within and the oppressor without are both necessary processes if we are to free ourselves from living Whiteness oppressively. This is a life time journey of commitment to resisting, challenging, and disrupting White supremacy/racism in our workplace and in our daily lives. As White anti-racists we prove our commitment to the anti-racist struggle by our actions and only then are we seen as allies. We are continuously in the process of creating, becoming, and re-visioning ourselves as we carve out a new White identity based on our possibilities and not our limitations. It is a life time process of unlearning and relearning how to see, hear, and read our world, of understanding the ways Whiteness has invested itself in racialized systems.
Within the past few decades, a burgeoning body of literature has emerged within academia in the area of critical White studies. Although White scholars have a tendency to perceive these writings as pioneering efforts, Roediger (1998) argues that critiquing Whiteness is a relatively recent endeavor for White scholars, but not for scholars of colour. People of colour, he points out, have observed Whiteness since the days of slavery and have passed on their observations by word of mouth as a way of self-preservation. Published works, such as The Ways of White Folks by Langston Hughes, were written in the years after slavery.

Roediger makes the following observation about Hughes's story, “Set in early-twentieth-century New York City, not the antebellum South, and describing the experiences of a black servant rather than a slave, Hughes’s story nonetheless claimed the angle of vision from the auction block as indispensable in describing how African-Americans have learned about white ways” (p. 3). In addition, Roediger (1998) argues African-American knowledge about Whiteness in the United States remains unacknowledged, unappreciated and for the most part suppressed. Toni Morrison’s 1992 volume on Whiteness, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Roediger states, is the most important work written on Whiteness in this decade and yet it did not receive the scholarly attention it deserved. Roediger contends that this dismissal is part of a larger pattern where African-American expertise on Whiteness is disbelieved or disregarded. He states, “What bell hooks describes as the fantastic White ability to imagine “that black people cannot see them” constitutes a white illusion at once durable, powerful, and fragile” (p. 6).

My problem of study in this thesis is an exploration of Whiteness. I am seeking to find out how the terrain of Whiteness has been mapped out by various scholars, both critical White scholars and scholars representing difference. I have relied quite heavily on authors writing from a Black location in the writing of this thesis. I am aware that this limits the discussion of
race and difference and that the inclusion of Asian, Latina/o, indigenous peoples perspectives' on otherness, for example, would certainly broaden and enrich these discussions. There are multiple lenses through which Whiteness can be viewed. However, I am also aware of the restraints in terms of scope of this thesis.

Taking the position that Whiteness has content, I seek to examine the literature on Whiteness, and to explore the following two key research questions: 1.) What are the various ways that Whiteness has been defined, conceptualized and theorized by scholars interrogating Whiteness? 2.) What are the pedagogical implications of critical White studies for the classroom teacher and for informing the political project of rethinking schooling? I will delve into the theoretical body of literature on Whiteness to discuss Whiteness as a system of power and domination, as well as to explore the liberatory and transformative possibilities of Whiteness. I will draw on rhetorical works that analyze Whiteness theoretically, and also empirical studies based on research on Whiteness completed with White subjects. My intent is to engage with the academic debates for the purpose of clarifying for educators what Whiteness is and how it operates as a power base to define normalcy. I will relate the theory on Whiteness to education in general and wherever possible to classroom practice in particular. The blending of theory with educational practice is intended to offer a more grounded approach to debate the discourses on Whiteness by connecting them with every day common sense ideas and practices. Making this connection is fueled by my belief that what we write, study, and research needs to be meaningful and have practical educational application. What I hope to accomplish then, is to make the theory on Whiteness more accessible to educators. With this objective in mind, my writing is guided by the desire to make this body of work a useful instrument for educational change and enable White educators to engage more effectively in the transformation of education. A central concern that drives this work is: “What do we as White educators need to know and understand about Whiteness in its multiplicity to enable us to clearly see the inherent inequalities and racism that are embedded
in our educational institutions, and to work to both transform ourselves and our schools in more anti-racist, liberatory ways?"

My Discursive Framework

I will use Dei’s (1995) integrative anti-racism discursive framework to engage with the literature on Whiteness. Dei’s framework allows for an interrogation of White power as privilege, domination, and oppression within Canadian educational contexts. This framework interrogates dominant ways of knowing and being in schools and questions how educational institutions continue to oppress on the bases of race, ethnicity, culture, language, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This framework illuminates the important and powerful connection between bodies and knowledge production in classrooms and understands that bodies enter the classroom from their experienced location. Crucial to the academic success and empowerment of the students is the powerful link between identity and schooling. Students need to see that schooling is about them, that it reflects their voices, experiences, communities, knowledges, and histories. An integrative anti-racism discursive framework, therefore, calls for the decentering of the Eurocentric, largely, male and heterosexuality knowledge base in educational institutions, so that marginalized knowledges can be brought into the center. Integral to this interrogation is a recognition of the discursive power of Whiteness - the ideologies, assumptions, and beliefs which justify the maintenance of White hegemony, and thus perpetuate inequality which negatively impacts on the lives of the minoritized in Canada. An integrative anti-racism gaze also clarifies how Whiteness can be mapped out in progressive terms by countering heterosexism, homophobia, White supremacy, and patriarchy. This approach highlights the need to forge alliances across differences, inspite of the difficulties and tensions that such an endeavour entails and to participate in the common vision of a more just and equitable society for all.

While recognizing the interlocking nature and relational dynamic of multiple oppressions,
Dei's integrative anti-racism framework places race in a central position in the anti-racism debate. Dei explains, "A genuine anti-racism "project" demands space for race to be analyzed outside of class and gender, so that race is reduced to neither class nor gender. Distinguishing race, class and gender as separate analytical (albeit interconnected) categories is an important step in unravelling the ideological effects of specific racialized material processes and structures" (2000, p. 15). Race is acknowledged by critical race scholars as being a socially, ideologically constructed category and as having no basis in biology. However, this intellectual insight does not take away from the reality that our world is racialized. Real-life political, and socio-economic consequences accrue as the result of the racial ordering of our world. The central analysis of race in the integrative anti-racism framework challenges the pervasive neutrality of Whiteness, the nonracialized positioning of Whites, the discursive power of the ideology of colour blindness, individualism and essentialism racism. This position exposes racial inequalities because it demands that as White people, we see where we are structurally situated in this race-based hierarchy. Thus, we must come to terms with our own complicity and understand that White supremacy/racism is as much about us, as it is about the racialized "Other". Without this analytical framing of race, the manifestations of racism will continue to be seen as external to ourselves and only in terms of individual acts of meanness.

Pivotal to this paradigm is the understanding that social oppressions do not exist in a hierarchy, and cannot be viewed as equal and interchangeable. My point of analysis of the theory and debates on Whiteness, posits that White racial privilege, heterosexual privilege, and male privilege are not separate nor are they on an equal footing. Rather they are interlocking in a relational dynamic. I concur with Dei in stating that oppressions are experienced differentially, at different times and in different spaces, and must be considered in both a contemporary and historical context. Oppressions, therefore, cannot be essentialized and seen as mutually exclusive categories. Rather, there are a plurality of experiences and perspectives that take account of social reality.
Dei uses the term “anti-difference” racism to refer to the various forms of oppression “based on religion, culture, class, language, gender, and sexual differences among people” (2000, p. 12). He cites Macchiusi 1992/3, as holding that these racisms are grounded in “the tendency to use white, Euro-American cultures (s) as the norm from which to evaluate all other cultures and to treat people differently” (Dei, 2000, p. 12). However, rather than conceptualize oppressions as “anti-difference” racism, I would like to discuss these within the context of the normative discourses of Whiteness (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 36). These normative discourses provide a critical filter for understanding how Whiteness oppresses along many different axes. It is the White yardstick by which all “Others” are measured, and are differentially treated and subjugated knowledges are silenced. Part of the unmasking of Whiteness will be through an examination of the normative discourses that need to be made visible, precisely because of the hidden, neutral “speaking for everyone” nature of Whiteness.

**Summary of Chapters**

In this chapter I “set the stage”, so to speak, by introducing the reader to myself, my politics, and my project on Whiteness. In Chapter 2, I deconstruct Whiteness as power and privilege. I argue that as White educators, we need to begin the process of gaining an intimate knowledge of how Whiteness operates as a hegemonic force in our educational institutions - as a force that oppresses, excludes, and silences the knowledges, experiences, and histories of indigenous peoples and minority groups. This is not, however, solely an external process of interrogation. As important as it is to critically examine Whiteness in terms of systems of domination, I argue that it is equally important to turn the gaze inward and to engage in serious critical self-reflection. Our understanding must seep through the small chinks in the armour of our White psyches, and move beyond anger, defensiveness, and denial, to critically reflect on our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Only when we gain an intimate knowledge of how we, ourselves, act from our Whiteness as oppressors, can we begin to use
this knowledge for rethinking schooling and begin to glimpse the possibilities for a more just and equitable world. This theme, of rethinking and imagining Whiteness in liberatory ways is taken up in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 turns our attention to pedagogies of Whiteness and explores the main tenents that need to shape and mold any pedagogy of Whiteness with the aim of transforming self and communities. The last chapter, Chapter 5, I explore rethinking schooling in light of the study of Whiteness. I posit that critical pedagogical shifts in thinking are needed on the part of White educators in order to rupture the status quo and engage in the transformational possibilities of schooling.

Clarifying Terms

In my writing I have capitalized the words “White” and “Whiteness”, as well as “Black” even though the American Psychological Association style uses lowercase letters for these words. My decision for capitalizing these words, even though this runs counter to the convention of APA, has to do with the politics of the interrogation of Whiteness. First, if Black constitutes a specific cultural group, even though there is tremendous diversity within this group and if it has deep political and social meaning, then, it requires to be seen as a proper noun (Wildman, 1996, p. xii). Given that I argue in my thesis for the unmasking of Whiteness and the viewing of Whiteness as a racial category, I feel that capitalizing “White” and “Whiteness” is part of the process of denormalizing Whiteness, in order to make its specificities apparent. “White” and “Whiteness” also have deep historical, political and social meaning and so for this reason, as well the terms should be capitalized.

Frequently throughout my writing, I have used the term White supremacy/racism, instead of referring only to racism. I believe it is important to explain my thinking here and acknowledge that before I began my own interrogation of Whiteness, I associated the term White supremacy with the many White supremacist groups such as the Klu Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations in the United States or the Heritage Front here in Canada. It was a term that
invoked fear and disgust for me, a term therefore, that I did not relate to myself. My thinking about the meaning and use of this term, however, has been influenced by bell hooks, and other scholars who have written on this subject. It is worth quoting hooks at some length on this topic as she writes about trying to remember when the word racism ceased to be the term which best expressed, for her, exploitation of people of colour and other minoritized groups, and when she began to understand the usefulness of the term White supremacy. She writes:

It may have been this contact or contact with fellow white English professors who want very much to have “a” black person in “their” department as long as that person thinks and acts like them, shares their values and beliefs, is in no way different, that first compelled me to use the term white supremacy to identify the ideology that most determines how white people in this society (irrespective of their political leanings to the right or left) perceive and relate to black people and other people of color. It is the very small but highly visible liberal movement away from the perpetuation of overtly racist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of black people which often masks how all-pervasive white supremacy is in this society, both as ideology and as behavior. When liberal whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control), they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated (1989, p. 113).

The use of this term, then, allows us as Whites, to see how we may, through a process of internalization, embody White supremacist values and beliefs, while at the same time, we eschew racism. It allows us to see how we are implicated in this system of race-based hierarchy so that we can no longer point the finger out there to say that racism is something other folks are doing but does not involve me. It allows us to stop buying into the convenient myth that racism no longer exists. It allows us to see that adhering to the belief that we are all the same under our skin, in fact, erases history and difference. It allows us to ask ourselves how White supremacy, rooted in colonial and imperial practice and thought, continues to shape our perspective on reality, and continues to affect our thoughts and behaviours. As educators, it allows us to ask ourselves how our perspective has been shaped by White
supremacy and how our school system continues to be informed by White supremacy. The historical tales of great White male explorers discovering and conquering America related in history textbooks throughout this country, is history through the eyes of the colonizers. It is a history steeped in White supremacy that glorifies the early Europeans’ exploitation and distorts, and erases their horrific deeds. Christensen argues that an inadequate definition of racism led many White feminists to engage in consciousness raising activities and continue to see “racism as a “personal” or “interactional” problem that can be overcome through more sensitivity to cultural differences and more attention to personal dynamics” (1997, p. 144). She reminds us that “racism is about the unequal distribution of economic wealth and political power in this country (and around the world) along lines of color, class, and culture” (p. 144).

I use the term people of colour, throughout this study to refer to non-White people, being cognizant that this term is not without problems because it is a collective term and homogenizes many diverse groups of people. Although these groups of people share a collective history of colonialism, they share different histories and sets of experiences and there are enormous differences among them. In Scheurich (1993), Ogbu (1978, 1990) has written that the contemporary position of African-Americans is very different from the experiences of other races who have immigrated to the United States because of the history of slavery. In addition, each race is not monolithic and there are differences in terms of class, gender, region, and, sexual orientation among minority groups.

A further problem with this term is that it then suggests that Whiteness is colourless. As Rodriguez reminds us, “Whiteness has historically been appropriated in unmarked ways by strategically maintaining as colorless its color (2000, p. 1). Nonetheless, I will use the term people of colour rather than the term non-White because the term non-White sets Whiteness as the standard or norm by which people of colour are then set against. Since this thesis is about interrogating the normativity of Whiteness, I do not want to use the term non-White. Therefore the term people of colour will be used along with terms such as minorities, and the
minoritized to refer to the non-dominant group. The term people of colour will also be used to include indigenous peoples.

Occasionally, throughout this thesis, I use the term indigenous peoples knowing that it is also not without problems “in that it collectivizes many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism has been vastly different” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 6). However, as Tuhiwai Smith states, “The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages” (p. 7).

Throughout this study, I will use “White” to mean anyone who benefits from White skin privilege (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996). Given that there are enormous differences in terms of power within this category, “White” can not be essentialized nor taken out of its historical context. Whiteness is a social construction and is not an unchanging, biological category (Frankenberg, 1993; Winant, 1997). In addition, there are many ways to be White, influenced by cultural, economic, political, and psychological contexts (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Winant, 1997). The intersections of social locations within Whiteness include ethnicity, culture, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, ableism, as well as other axes of difference.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) state that it was only after the racialization of slavery, around 1680 that Whiteness and Blackness began to represent racial categories. It was at this critical point in history that the White race as a distinct category began to take shape. Whiteness began to be associated with rationality and came to denote an elite racial group. Immigrant workers in the mid-nineteenth century America sought to be seen as White because Whiteness was viewed as a position of power (p. 9). Furthermore, the perception of those who are considered White continues to change historically over time, place, and circumstance. Ruth Frankenberg points out that there is a conflictual and shifting nature to who is
considered White. She explains, "... Jewish American, Italian Americans, and Latinos have, at different times and from varying political standpoints, been viewed as both 'white' and 'nonwhite'. Also, the history of 'interracial' marriage and sexual relationships also demonstrates, 'white' is, as much as anything else, an economic and political category maintained over time by a changing set of exclusionary practices, both legislative and customary" (1993, pp. 11-12).

Daniels (1997), a University of Regina sociology professor, argues that the ever shifting boundaries of Whiteness may be shrinking and becoming more exclusionary. He developed an informal questionnaire listing countries and/or nationalities and asked his mostly White, University of Regina students to answer, without thinking, who they considered to be White. The results, he states, have been consistent over the past eight years: Spain and Portugal, as well as, Greece and Italy are no longer really "White." However, Israelis are considered "White." Most classes only chuckle, he reports, when asked if Quebecois (described by Daniels as "the nigger of North America") are White. Canadians and Americans are seen as White, which suggests that only the White dominant group is taken into consideration, thereby excluding the multicultural make-up of both countries. The exclusionary nature of the perceived authentic American is a point argued by Toni Morrison (1992). She contends that being American is equated with being exclusively White.

Daniels's concept of Whiteness moves beyond skin colour, language, culture, and an association with European-ness to a much more complex interplay of power, hierarchy, and Western notions of membership in a master race. Daniels argues that the results of the survey have very little to do with skin colour and much more to do with which nationalities are perceived to be pro-Western allies, politically stable, wealthy and industrialized. He furthers this line of thought by stating that Whiteness is considered synonymous with ruling class membership.
In concluding this chapter, let me restate my argument: if we, as White people are to move beyond our denial, silencing of racism, and the predominant view of racism as an individual issue, then we must interrogate Whiteness beginning with ourselves and understanding our White positionality. Implicit in our positioning is our participation in White supremacy/racism from which we unfairly benefit and the understanding that “conferred dominance” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 12) rests on the racialization and subordination of “Others.” It is crucial to the deconstruction process to seek to understand the social construction of ourselves, and our world, as well as the diverse ways that knowledge is constructed by those defined by difference. As White anti-racists, we engage in the dialectical process of deconstructing Eurocentric hegemony and decolonizing our own minds, as we strive to live our Whiteness in more anti-racist and liberatory ways.

If the theory on Whiteness is to inform pedagogical practice, then, we can begin by acknowledging that students are very diverse and bring multiple subject positions, diverse histories, and experiences to the classroom. We can no longer ignore this diversity and teach students as if they were all White, heterosexual and male. They are not. The link between knowledge production and identity is very important and must be made in education. This requires becoming conscious of the multi-layered silencing and exclusion of the stories, experiences, and histories of the minoritized, including gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, that exist in educational institutions and of the destructiveness of this monocultural approach for all youth. Marginalized and oppositional knowledges, for example, drawing on authors, poets, historians, and scientists of diverse backgrounds, provide alternative curricular perspectives, and empower students.

Working from an anti-racist perspective as White educators involves moving away from the Eurocentric lens from which we view the world. Challenging White discourses that are racist, sexist, and heterosexist and that continue to shape our thinking is a life-time process that requires critical self-reflection and an on-going interrogation of Whiteness. We need to
ask ourselves if we can recognize racist, sexist and heterosexist ideologies when we hear them in conversations, when we see them in films, and when we read them in newspapers. If we can’t recognize these White discourses in our everyday lives, we will not be able to recognize them when they emerge in our classrooms, in the conversations of our students, in the films we view, and in the textbooks we use. Thus, these ideologies will continue to be perpetuated in our classrooms. This situation does not benefit anyone, not the White students who need opportunities to deconstruct the hegemonic force of Whiteness and unlearn oppressive behaviour or the students of colour who are disadvantaged and oppressed by this racist system. Whiteness as hegemony needs to be deconstructed if we are to interrogate the ways that Whiteness maintains and secures its power, both historically and in a contemporary context. It is to this, then that we turn our attention in Chapter 2.
Chapter 2

Deconstructing Eurocentric Hegemony

Although an exploration and mapping of Whiteness in progressive, democratic, and anti-racist ways remains the ultimate goal for White educators, Whiteness cannot be interrupted and transformed until we first, critically engage the multiple ways it plays itself out as hegemony, both in our institutions and in our every day lives. This calls for a rigorous and critical problematisation of Whiteness as systems of domination that not only marginalize racialized “Others” but advantage Whites, economically, politically, socially, and psychologically, at their expense. An interrogation of the discourse, the culture, the structures, the mechanisms and the social relations of Whiteness which produce racialized subjects, both White and “Other” is needed. (Levine-Rasky, 2000). Our task as educators, committed to educational transformation is to dismantle these structures, discourses, and social relations of Whiteness in our educational system and to unravel the multiple ways Whiteness operates as a power block that defines normalcy (Dei, 2000). Here, I quote Kincheloe and Steinberg to understand the notion of hegemony:

Dominant power is no longer exercised simply by physical force but through social psychological attempts to win men and women’s consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the schools, the media, the family and the church. This notion of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci in Mussolini’s Italian prisons of the 1920s and 1930s recognizes that the winning of popular consent is a very complex process. The power bloc wins consent by way of a pedagogical process, a form of learning that engages people’s conceptions of the world in such a way that transforms (not displaces) them with perspectives more compatible with the elite (1997, p. 90).

This chapter begins with an exploration of the need to name Whiteness and to deconstruct Whiteness as normativity. I then explore Whiteness as privilege to show how it is at work in our daily experiences and lives. I map out the discursive dimensions of Whiteness and the way
that White ideology functions to maintain White supremacy/racism. Exposing the power of Whiteness to construct ideologies that define and represent difference is a crucial step toward interrogating hegemonic ways of knowing. Frankenberg, among many other scholars reminds us that, "the material and discursive dimensions of whiteness are always, in practice, interconnected (1993, p. 2). I end this chapter with a look at Whiteness as terror, and suggest that this construction of Whiteness by scholars whose lives are defined by difference, pushes us to re-examine and re-think the ways we have been racially socialized to view Whiteness in benevolent terms.

**Whiteness as Constructed Normativity**

Frankenberg’s 1993 publication, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, has become a landmark study within the field of critical White studies. Frankenberg conducted life-history interviews with White women, located in California to probe how race shapes their daily thoughts, sense of self, experiences, and lives. She asserts that White women live racially structured lives. The name she gives to this structure is Whiteness. She reasons that just as men and women’s lives are shaped by their gender, so their lives are also shaped by their race. This insight ruptures Whites’ commonly held belief that it is only people of colour whose lives are structured by race. She argues that “any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses” (p.1). Her study has provided key insights into Whiteness as a historical and social construction. She argues that Whiteness has a set of linked dimensions, “First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint’, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (p. 1).

Historically, Whiteness has been an unmarked, unnamed category and has remained
largely unexamined. Dyer (1997) argues that this unnamed status is intrinsically connected to how Whiteness maintains its power. Endemic to White culture is that we experience ourselves as nonracialized individuals - we function as the human norm - other people are raced, whereas we are just people; “not a particular race, just the human race” (Dyer, p. 2). When we speak about race, we exclude ourselves and speak about all races except for Whites. We refer to African-Americans, Chinese, Indigenous Peoples but never to Euro-Canadians. Often we invoke race when it is expedient. For example, the naming of race when reporting in the newspaper of a crime, linking it to Black youth or Asian youth but not White youth. Ian F. Haney-Lopez (1996) offers a view of the transparency of Whiteness by citing an incident at a legal feminist conference where participants were asked to pick three words to describe themselves. All of the women of colour selected at least one word to refer to their race. The White participants, on the other hand, did not indicate any racial markers. Frankenberg (1993) calls for an unmasking of Whiteness as a racial category in order to interrupt its power to define normativity. The act of naming Whiteness, then, is highly political and seeks to move Whiteness away from its transparent, invisible status and expose its social, cultural, historical and political mechanisms which function to construct dominance (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Roediger, 1994). Whiteness needs to be “refigured as constructed and dominant rather than as norm” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6).

Whiteness possesses a universality and an overarching authority to represent and name, not only itself, but the “Other” (Dyer, 1997). Dyer states, “White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people’s; white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to
fail" (1997, p. 9). When the discursive power of Whiteness is ruptured, however, Whites come to see their own particularities and to understand that they speak from situated locations; from their Whiteness, while at the same time, recognizing that there are multiple positions within Whiteness.

In seeing Whiteness as a standpoint, then, we become conscious of how we speak and act from our Whiteness, “from a privileged position in the web of reality” (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 8). We view our lives as racialized, and deconstruct the ways our worldview has been shaped by both the historical and contemporary realities of Whiteness. The school curriculum, for example, is legitimized as academic knowledge worthy of study and not, in fact, for what it is: a White perspective seen through the eyes of the European colonizer. When another perspective is presented it is discounted as subjective, hype, or dogma. Monture-Angus, an Aboriginal law professor, (1995) asserts that she receives negative feedback from some of her White law students when she presents an aboriginal point of view. She relates that she is criticized by these students for not being objective and is told that she is presenting opinions, and propaganda, and not law to these White students. The teaching of her White colleagues, on the other hand, are not questioned in this way, although their perspectives on law are shaped by their opinions and are heavily invested in maintaining dominance. Their knowledge base, however, is institutionalized as the “canon” of academic knowledge. Consistent with Monture-Angus, we may as Whites, be critically conscious of how we are refiguring our worldview in ways that oppose dominant paradigms of knowledge and challenging ourselves to decolonize our minds.

Coming to see our own particularities and positioning within Whiteness changes the way our anti-racism work is framed, as well as broadening the debates on race and racism. A common White perception is that racism is an issue that affects minority groups but not an issue that directly involves or implicates ourselves. Frankenberg explains that, “Racism can, in
short, be conceived as something external to us rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self” (1993, p. 6). Engaging in anti-racism work then can take on the cloak of White acts of sympathy, a project of compassion but not one that is intricately connected to our own lives (Frankenberg, 1993). Our focus can not remain exclusively on the “Other” but necessitates a critical scrutiny of our rootedness in White supremacy/racism to disrupt White claims to innocence and “good intentions”. bell hooks, among other scholars of colour has vociferously argued for a needed shift in focus of White scholars:

One change in direction that would be real cool would be the production of a discourse on race that interrogates whiteness. It would just be so interesting for all those white folks who are giving blacks their take on blackness to let them know what’s going on with whiteness. In far too much contemporary writing-though there are some outstanding exceptions - race is always an issue of Otherness that is not white; it is black, brown, yellow, red, purple even. Yet only a persistent, rigorous, and informed critique of whiteness could really determine what forces of denial, fear, and competition are responsible for creating fundamental gaps between professed political commitment to eradicating racism and the participation in the construction of a discourse on race that perpetuate racial domination (1990, p. 56).

Whites occupy structured positions of racial advantage and as Frankenberg so eloquently expresses, “to speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism.” (1996, p. 6). Without this, Whites remain blind to the differential power between the dominant group and subordinate groups and to the historical conditions that explain the unequal distribution of power and resources that prevail. White educators will continue to buy into the evocations of pluralism and diversity that celebrate “we are all the same under our skin” and, indeed, mask the existing raced hierarchy. An insistence that racism no longer exists, and an allowance for the erasure of the historical legacy of racism from the school texts will persist.

In Frankenberg’s study of White women she found that at times culture was linked to imperialism and to systems of domination and was described as “bad” and at times was seen as
an empty cultural space, both spaceless and nameless, which only took form in relation to others whose identities were marked by ethnicity, race, region, and class. One of the women describes Whiteness as a cultural space in the following way:

... If I had an ethnic base to identify from, if I was even Irish American, that would have been something formed, if I was a working-class woman, that would have been something formed. But to be a Heinz 57 American, a white, class-confused American, land of the Kleenex type American, is so formless in and of itself. It only takes shape in relation to other people (1993, p. 196).

Frankenberg states that “the extent to which identities can be named seems to have an inverse relationship to power in the U.S. social structure” (p. 196). Thus White dominant identity is defined through what one is not. She links this to the power and privilege of White culture to not be named, or the way “whiteness comes to be an unmarked or neutral category, whereas other cultures are specifically marked “cultural” (p. 197). Frankenberg warns that there are certain dangers in White culture being seen as no culture. She found that in the narratives of these women, Whiteness appeared to function as norm and at the same time White culture was a reference point for measuring all others. She states:

This normativity has underwritten oppression from the beginning of colonial expansion and has had impact in multiple ways: from the American pioneers’ assumption of a norm of private property used to justify appropriation of land that within their worldview did not have an owner, and the ideological construction of nations like Britain as white, to Western feminism’s Eurocentric shaping of its movements and institutions (p. 204).

Another danger in seeing White culture as unmarked is that there was also a tendency among these women to see culture in dichotomous ways, as in White culture verses “Other” cultures. Within this framework these White women valourized the culture of “Others” as part of the colonial discourse. Culture was thus conceptualized as reified and fixed. It was separated from history and agency and the experiences of daily life. Frankenberg argues that
what is needed is a critical understanding of who we are in terms of our Whiteness as history and our specificities in terms of culture, politics and economics (p. 204).

**Whiteness at Work in Our Daily Lives**

Not long ago, I received a call from an African-Canadian elementary school teacher in her second year of teaching who had been placed under review by her principal. Such an action is taken very seriously and threatens job security. As I listened to her story I wondered at the lack of encouragement and support she had been shown by her principal. She was experiencing difficulty with classroom management and had been told that she should handle her own discipline problems. She had also been told that perhaps she should consider another career so that by the time she called me, she had resigned herself to leaving education. Why, I wondered, had she been placed under review so quickly, and given so little support and encouragement?

There are so few minority teachers in the system; they need to be encouraged and supported, not ousted out.

I would like to critically examine this minority teacher’s situation in terms of Whiteness as power and privilege. As any elementary or high school teacher knows, one of the most difficult aspects of teaching is classroom control. There is not one of us who could not name and discuss a difficult or even disastrous year in terms of classroom management. I would like to relate two situations that happened not long ago, one involving myself and the other, an inexperienced White teacher to illustrate how White privilege works for us. These narratives provide a contrast to this minority teacher’s experience and illustrate the need for critical reflection on the forces at play that discourage and actively do not support a minority teacher experiencing difficulties on the one hand, and encourage and support White teachers, on the other.

The year I separated from my husband with two small children proved to be my most
difficult teaching year. I simply didn’t have the emotional strength to deal with difficult students and there were many in my Grade 4 class that year. Numerous strategies, however, were initiated by my vice-principal to help me with my class. Initially, a supply teacher was brought in for a few weeks so that the two of us could work with the students together and establish routines and deal with behavioural issues. In time, two very disruptive students were removed from my room and placed in a small class setting. This, I might add, was before they were identified with a behavioural exceptionality, which, of course, takes time. These students were better able to work and the class functioned more smoothly without them. My vice-principal worked closely with some of the students to encourage positive classroom behaviour. I was encouraged to apply for an ESL placement the next year where I could work with students in small groups and thus “get myself on my feet.” This is exactly what I did, and I have continued on successfully with my teaching career.

A second example that provides a contrast to this minority teacher’s experience, involves a first-year White teacher who had a difficult teaching assignment: a half-time position as a Grade 3 teacher at one school and a half-time position as a Grade 6 teacher at another school. She was experiencing a great deal of difficulty with classroom control and management with the Grade 6 class. Her father, however, was a retired principal and after a few difficult months of teaching, she was given a new teaching assignment altogether in a quiet, suburban school that was considered easier for her to handle. Although she did not have the special accreditation course to teach English as a Second Language, this was the assignment that she was given.

**White Privilege**

I would argue that these examples are not isolated incidents but are part of a larger pattern of inequality and illustrate how Whiteness works for us as power and privilege. I am not
suggesting that teachers who experience difficulties should not be given help or shown compassion but rather that this treatment needs to be extended to all teachers. When support is provided for White teachers but not extended to minority teachers than this differential treatment can be read as part of the inherent inequalities and racism that are perpetuated in our educational institutions.

McIntosh (1988) has mapped White privilege in an attempt to make Whites’ structured position of advantage visible. In her groundbreaking article, she likens White privilege to an invisible knapsack of unearned advantages that we, as Whites, can access in our daily experiences and lives. They remain, by and large, unacknowledged and unrecognized by Whites as we have been taught not to see privilege in a system that operates to maintain dominance. Again, because of our racial socialization we view our lives “as neutral, as normal, as universally available to everyone, as speaking to all” (p. 10). In order to make White privilege visible, McIntosh lists ways in which we experience privilege in ordinary, every day ways. For example:

I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existance of their race.
I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily protection.
I can be pretty sure if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

In acknowledging these unearned privileges, she contends that we have to give up the myth of meritocracy as these privileges have nothing to do with individual merit, rather, White hegemony opens doors for us personally simply because of the colour of our skin. We are overrewarded, and benefit unfairly from racism, while people of colour are underrewarded,
and disadvantaged. The resistance to examining White privilege, of course, will be great, as denial of privilege works to protect it and keep it in place. Making White privilege visible means that we can no longer think of racism as individual acts of meanness, as a matter of changing attitudes, but must look at the way dominance has been conferred on us systematically. We have, in effect, as Whites been given social permission to dominate, to control. McIntosh contends that when we look at the conditions and behaviours which “privileged systems” produce, the term privilege seems too positive a term as it plays itself out at best as thoughtlessness and at worst, murderous acts (p. 12).

**Systems of Interlocking Privilege and Oppression**

As previously stated, an anti-racism perspective acknowledges the saliency of race and the interlocking and relational dynamic of all oppressions (class, gender, sexuality etc.) (Dei, 1995. There is a danger in making analogies between oppressions, precisely because oppressions are not interchangeable and are experienced differently. Grillo and Wildman (1998) have written about the difficulties that arise when White women compare sexism to racism. When making analogies between sexism and racism, White women were placing their concerns in center stage, and racism was obscured and marginalized. Thus the pattern of racial domination was perpetuated. To the women of colour this experience felt like an appropriation of the pain of racism and added to the tension between White women and women of colour. The message that continues to be given to White women by women of colour is to listen carefully to the stories of women of colour and to make visible their own White privilege.

Sleeter found in her training sessions with White, female educators that “the analogies they draw between racism and what they know about sexism, class mobility, and the White
ethnic experience tend to minimize the importance of race as they see it (1998, p. 36). Many of these teachers had working class roots and in their experience, education served them as a means of upward mobility. Therefore, they saw adhering to the personal values of hard work and personal achievement, as being an open avenue for everyone regardless of ethnicity.

According to Sleeter these women viewed ethnicity as being equated with race. Because these teachers viewed classism, sexism, and racism as a matter of individual prejudices, Sleeter's framework for working with White teachers and students is to analyze social institutions rather than characteristics of individuals and groups, and to show how institutions work differently for different groups. No simple analogies can be made between oppressions. As Thompson points out, "The challenge is to recognize what has motivated us to question authority without using it as a way to imply that the injustices we have faced are worse or more long-standing than racism" (1999, p. 75).

**The Discursive Power of Whiteness**

McLaren states that "Whiteness is a type of articulatory practice that can be located in the convergence of colonialism, capitalism, and subject formation" (1997, p. 25). White discourses then can be seen as articulatory practices which are linked to specific political, social, and historical arrangements and are designed to maintain its economic, political, social and legal interests. White discourses are articulated in many forms designed to protect its vested interests: the promotion of race-baiting, anti-immigrant sentiments, the promulgation of the ideology of colour blindness, and the conservative discourses of the Far Right which construct White males as the newly oppressed group (p. 9). These discourses operate to maintain the status quo, attempt to erase White privilege and secure the colour line.

Whiteness also churns out xenophobic discourses that mask its economic and political interests. The Canadian fan-fare, and flag waving that accompanied the United States invasion
of Iraq in 1991 is one such example. The demonizing of Saddam Hussein and the creation of a convenient “us versus them” attitude by the mainstream media made the killing of 100,000 Iraqi people inconsequential, a victory to be celebrated and not the evil, murderous act that indeed it was. Porteous, writing on the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War states, “The language used by the media, politicians and military alike to relate information about the war served to dehumanize the opponent and sanitize the bloody realities of death and destruction. We are never allowed to imagine the faces behind the statistics. Or at best, we are presented with distorted and disgusting stereotypes which feed our existing biases. Arabs are marauding terrorists sheiks on camels. They are certainly not real people with real lives and, therefore, of little consequence.” (1996).

During the colonial period travellers’ stories and adventurers’ tales, largely the experiences and observations of White men had wide coverage and were disseminated back to the public in Europe and quickly became fixed in the ideas of the public cultural domain (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Tuhiwai Smith states that “images of the ‘cannibal’ chief, the ‘red’ Indian, the ‘witch’ doctor, or the ‘tattooed and shrunken’ head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism, generated further interest, and therefore further opportunities, to represent the Other again” (p. 8). These dehumanizing representations of the “Other,” were constructed around Western notions of culture, religion, race, and class and have become embedded in popular White cultural discourse.

Christensen states that “whiteness and the racist ideologies that accompanied its acceptance, arose to justify the economic exploitation and political domination by Europeans and European Americans, from the massive thefts of land from Native Americans and Mexicans, to the colonization of Puerto Ricans, to the enslavement of millions of Africans” (1997, p. 623). Hill Collins argues that the controlling images of Black women originated during the slave era and attest to the ideological dimension of Black womens’ oppression. The
construction of racist ideology represents how certain assumed qualities are attached to Black women and how they function to justify oppression. She states that “from the mammies, Jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, the nexus of negative stereotypical images applied to African-American women has been fundamental to Black women’s oppression” (1990, p. 7).

Both popular culture and the media play a central role in the representations and ideological construction of the “Other”. The Black male represented as an object of both terror and desire, has long been integral to the ideology of Whiteness. The historical roots of this racist myth lie in colonial discourses used to keep the Black male in subjugated positions. This image “resonates deep-seated fears and anxieties within the psyche of White America” (Gabriel, 1998, p. 19). These images have a powerful hold on the White psyche and on our social, and collective unconsciences through the perpetuation of representations of the Black male in the media and White contemporary popular culture as an evil person to be feared.

In “Media Representations of Violence Against Women”, Humian (1995/6) explores how racist fears are frequently exploited as press attention increases when victims are middle-class Whites and their attackers are non-White men. She sites a study by Lorber (1993) who points out that the same week that a White investment banker was gang raped by Black men in Central Park, and became headline news and the subject of discussion all over North America, 28 women, aged between twenty-eight and fifty-one, mostly Black and Hispanic, were also raped in New York City. Their stories, however, were not considered newsworthy (p. 40). These examples show how the White/dominant discourses of danger are taken up in the media. Stories about Black men resonate with racist beliefs and summon all too easily the specter of the Black male as rapist, murderer, and thief. These stories are too-easily believed and often receive an enormous amount of publicity. At the same time stories of violence
against Black women are ignored and considered un-newsworthy.

Henry Giroux writes of the popular press’s role in propagating a discourse of Black crime, and Black “gangsta” rap artists churning out lurid stories that exploit racial fears through sensational articles:

The tawdry representations of Black experience that these magazines produced gained increasing currency in the dominant media. Racial coding, parading as commonsense populism, associated Blacks with a series of negative equivalencies that denied racial injustice while affirming the repressed, unspeakable racist unconscious of dominant White culture. Images of menacing Black youth, welfare mothers, and convicts, framed by the evocative rhetoric of fear-mongering journalists, helped to bolster the image of besieged White middle-class suburban family threatened by “an alien culture and peoples who are less civilized than the native ones...a people who stand lower in the order of nature, defined by race, by color, and sometimes by genetic inheritance (1997, p. 288).

**The Ideology of Whiteness at Work in Our Everyday Lives**

As Whites, we remain very unaware of the pervasiveness of Whiteness and of how we are affected unconsciously by the ideology of Whiteness and of the ways these ideologies function to cover up power differences and maintain the status quo. hooks enthuses that Whites, “...have a deep emotional investment in the myth of ‘sameness’, even as their actions reflect the primacy of whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think” (1992, p. 167).

When White educators engage in anti-racism work without critical reflection on Whiteness, difficulties can arise that negate effective anti-racism practice inspite of their best of intentions. The following example serves to illustrate this point. Not long ago, the local Hamilton Board of Education Teachers’ magazine, “The Apple” published an article written by a middle school teacher that highlighted classroom activities for Black History Month. Students created posters, wrote poetry and made collages featuring aspects of Black history. Along with the article was a photograph showing a White teacher and a group of multi-racial students holding a banner which proudly proclaimed, “We do not see colour!”.
In a society determined not to see colour, this proclamation speaks not to the unity of the students, as I think perhaps was the intention of this teacher, but to the colour-evasive and power-evasive ideology of Whiteness. The oppressiveness of the statement, “We do not see colour” lies in the fact that it tries to obliterate difference which arises from historical contingencies. It is at once a denial of difference and of domination. In other words, if Whites do not register colour, they also do not register White privilege and power, nor the historical legacy of racism (Rodriguez, 2000). When the historical legacy of racism is erased, it can then be maintained that we are all on an even playing field. Rodriguez argues, “What is the discourse of color blindness but nothing more than a neoconservative right-wing racial project committed to dismantling important rights discourse as well as ‘preferential’ programs like affirmative action” (p. 9).

Rodriguez articulates the need for the “counter-discursive marking of whiteness” (2000:9) to expose the prevalence of the celebrations of colour blindness, the ideology of individualism and the articulation of difference as an ethnicity paradigm. The ideology of colour blindness, as mentioned, functions to erases power differentials. Through the ideology of individualism, Whites tend to interpret racism as an individual belief rather than as an institutional system supported by a collective worldview. Whites adhere to the belief in equal opportunity where individual effort is justly rewarded and justify the existing social and economic inequalities by pathologizing individuals and families. If one does not succeed it is due to their own inherent deficiencies (Rodriguez, 1997). Secondly, there is a tendency to view differences within the ethnicity paradigm which views all people as immigrants within a nation of immigrants, connected to a common history of ancestors seeking equal opportunity in a country exemplified by democratic values and principles. Viewing Whiteness through the ethnicity paradigm doesn’t allow for a critical reading of the power of Whiteness and the connection to colonialism and imperialism.
I have found that White people are often eager to tell me their opinions about racism when they learn that I am studying in the area of anti-racist education. When I engage in these conversations with well-educated, middle-class White people, I often feel, as Wellman (1999) has expressed, like a spy. For me, these encounters are seized as opportunities to analyze White people’s thoughts, and feelings about issues of race and racism. My strongest impression from these conversations is that most White people do not see themselves as implicated in White supremacy/racism. This, in fact, was one of the findings in Frankenberg’s 1993 study of White women’s conceptions of racism. She found that the White women she interviewed knew far more about racial oppression than they did about race privilege in their own lives. Sleeter (1996), in her research with White educators, argues that Whites deflect attention away from White racism and avoid looking at their own race privilege by equating racism with individual prejudice and by participating in the construction of the “Other” in racially inferior terms. She found that White people bond and form solidarity with each other on this basis and she argues that this is one way of maintaining the colour line.

I have seen evidence of both of these researcher’s findings in my own experiences. In a conversation with a White woman I met recently, I was emphatically informed that Canada was going to have a huge race problem because she witnessed racism inflicted on East Indian people by the Chinese in her work place. Caucasian people, on the other hand, she related, had already learned not to be racist but these people had not. My response was to shift the focus onto White racism. I did this, not to negate the fact that other manifestations of racism exist in our society and need to be explored but because of the way this woman constructed Whites as being non-racist. I felt that this negation needed to be addressed.

Consequently, I responded to her by saying that I was speaking about racism in terms of power relations, in terms of the dominant group and the subordinate groups. In other words, I was speaking about White supremacy, and how it operates in this country to dominate,
control, suppress, and silence people of colour and that there were economic, political, and social consequences that they endured because of this. I went on to speak about the need for personal transformation on the part of Whites because we have been raised in a racist society and inculcated with racist thought in all our institutions and so we had a lot of unlearning to do in our lives. Needless to say, the potential bond between us, as two White women, diminished as the gulf between our thinking became evident. Disturbing, though not surprising, this woman’s comments reflect the influence of colonial discourses still very prevalent today. Colonial discourses construct Whites as rational, reasonable and civilized, while racial “Others” are constructed as inferior, irrational, and uncivilized. People of colour were viewed by this woman as intolerant, uncivilized outsiders who cause problems by bringing their racist attitudes to this, otherwise, peaceful nation. There is also an implicit, unstated assumption that Canada belongs to those who are White, and is being spoiled by people of colour.

**Whiteness as Terror**

Frankenberg argues that Whites’ fear of people of color is an inversion of reality and that people of color have far more to fear from White people. She states, “White people’s fear of people of color is an inversion that can be contextualized in a number of ways. Most importantly, it must be understood as an element of racist discourse crucially linked to essentialist racism, or the idea that people of color are fundamentally “Other” than White people: different, inferior, less civilized, less human, more animal, than white” (1993, p. 61). hooks writes of the “naive amazement” that White students express when confronted by the notion that Black people critically assess White people (1991, p. 342). This, she contends, is itself an expression of racism. A lot is invested in the belief of sameness, in thinking that we are all just people, that will make racism go away. hooks asserts that Whites have been
"socialized to believe the fantasy, that whiteness represents goodness and all that is benign and non-threatening" (1991, p. 340). By contrast, she asserts that in the Black imagination, Whiteness is often associated with terror, "a power that wounds, hurts, tortures" (p. 340). hooks states that there is "a profound psychological impact of white racist domination" (p. 340) experienced by Blacks in response to the legacy of White domination. Whites' inability to conceive of this terror, she holds, is itself an expression of White supremacy.

Whiteness as terror is expressed by Monture-Angus when she relates the sheer terror she experienced when her eleven-year-old son fell and broke his arm and was taken to the hospital. She was accused of child abuse and separated from her son for eight days. This experience has left her fearful to this day of taking her children to the doctor. She states:

It was the doctors at the hospital who vigorously pursued the abuse allegations. For example, most laughed when they heard my professional credentials while others continued to question me on how frequently my husband beat me. I had only been married six weeks! My experience of the hospital was of layer upon layer of racist treatment. I have not yet accepted that the doctors or the hospital have done nothing to set this right. Even telling this little of a long story ties my belly in knots and I am afraid. Eventually they discovered my boy had a bone disorder and could not prove their case in court (which is not to say that we were ever vindicated) (1995, p. 208).

The notion of Whiteness as terror as articulated by bell hooks (1991) is expanded on by Nelson Rodriguez (1998) to include the hate and oppression directed towards gays and lesbians. Rodriguez discusses his personal feelings around Whiteness as terror given his own identity as a gay man. He states that hooks (1991) in her essay, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" offers him a language when she writes of Whiteness as terror as a response to the history of White supremacy/racism. Acknowledging that he does not want to decenter hooks's discussion in terms of what it means specifically for Blacks, he states her discussion of Whiteness as terror resonates for him "with a shock of recognition" and helps him express the terror he lives with as a White gay male (1998, 53). Constantly living with the
fear that danger may strike at any moment and being the object of hate, he considers the terrorizing dimensions of Whiteness but also envisions a shared solidarity. Solidarity building, he enthuses, can stretch across all axes of difference and offers hope for fighting oppressive forms of Whiteness.

In summary, fleshing out Whiteness as hegemony involves an investigation of how Whiteness is constructed to maintain economic, political, social, and legal dominance. A critical reading of Whiteness explores Whiteness as a social construction, a place from which we construct knowledge about ourselves, “Others,” and the world. White postionality necessitates seeing our own particularities, and disrupting the normativity of Whiteness. Deconstructing White ideologies of colour blindness, the belief in meritocracy and the ethnicity paradigm that justify economic exploitation and the maintenance of the colour line is critical to exposing the hegemony of Whiteness. Seeing Whiteness as terror helps to shatter the construction of the White subject as representing goodness and virtue and provides a critical, alternative lens through which to view Whiteness. Developing critical consciousness by decolonizing our minds, is necessary work if we are to actively and successfully challenge the status quo and transform educational institutions.
Chapter 3

Whiteness As A Project of Possibility

Most of the existing scholarship in the field of critical White studies has focused on the social, cultural, historical, and political construction of Whiteness as dominance. While significant inroads have been made in elucidating how Whiteness operates oppressively, these works have come under scrutiny for representing Whiteness as a monolithic category, defined exclusively in terms of hegemony. A theoretical and pedagogical shift within White studies posits that Whiteness needs to be examined beyond this essentialized category to take account of the multiple, complex, and contradictory subject locations within Whiteness. Whiteness signifies power and privilege and “is intrinsically connected to unfolding relations of domination” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6), however, it cannot be essentialized. Enormous differences within the category “White” play themselves out in a relational dynamic which is often complex and contradictory. The forces of patriarchy, heterosexism, and classism work to privilege and oppress, separate and divide along axes of difference. Therefore, the multiple subject locations we occupy within the space of Whiteness equate to significant differences in the ways Whiteness is lived and experienced.

Numerous tensions have developed for White people in the equating of Whiteness with oppression exclusively. Feelings of guilt and powerlessness are responses to the perceived conflation of Whites and whiteness and to the failure to connect Whiteness with axes of ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality. Framing Whiteness in this way has meant “whites are confronted with an undesirable, violent image of themselves for which few alternatives are presented” (Levine-Rasky, 2000). Given these tensions and many more too numerous to mention here, an exploration of the liberatory possibilities of Whiteness and the development of a proactive, White identity begins to inform the political project of Whiteness. Giroux
argues that projects of possibility, and of hope are crucial for White youth to construct positive racial identities:

All students need to feel that they have a personal stake in their racial identity (however fluid, unstable, and transitory), an identity that will allow them to assert a view of political agency in which they can join with diverse groups around a notion of democratic public life that affirms racial differences through a “rearticulation of cultural, social, and political citizenship” (1997, p. 297).

In this chapter I explore the construction of positive racial identities through an exploration of a question posed by Rodriguez: “What does it mean to know oneself separate from whiteness, not separating oneself from whiteness or Whites, but fighting for an identity that isn’t encompassed by dominating forms of whiteness?” (1998, p. 49). This question involves a rethinking and reworking of our identities based on a critical reformulation of our Whiteness. I am seeking to learn about the process of transformation which leads White people to become critically conscious of the oppressiveness of Whiteness and who choose to root out all oppression in their lives. I begin by uncovering some of the debates that have been brought forward by scholars who advocate rethinking Whiteness to critique the new abolitionists’ project. This project is advanced by scholars such as Garvey and Ignatiev (1996) who argue for the abolishment or destruction of Whiteness. The project of rethinking and refiguring Whiteness along progressive lines is advocated by such scholars as Henry Giroux (1997), Nelson Rodriguez (1998), Howard Winant (1997), and George Yudice (1995) among others. Winant (1997) writes of the need to rearticulate Whiteness, rather than repudiating it as the new abolishonists propose. Rodriguez (1998) suggests exploring what Whiteness can do, by living Whiteness progressively rather than oppressively. Giroux (1997) articulates a similar position by arguing that Whites need to create an oppositional space for rethinking and rearticulating Whiteness.

Taking the position that Whiteness can be reworked and refigured, I explore the processes of transformation needed to develop positive White racial identities. These processes take
account of Whiteness as a social construction and consider the rootedness and complexities of racial formation (Winant, 1997). I explore the embeddedness of internalized racism and the importance of developing on-going, rigorous and informed critique to the transformation of consciousness. I then map out factors that encourage anti-racist White consciousness to develop and look at Becky Thompson’s autobiographical narrative as one example of transformed consciousness. I briefly focus on both the usefulness and limitations of Janet Helms’ (1995) model of White racial identity development. Lastly, I explore the notion of borderland consciousness by examining David Wellman’s (1999) article entitled, “Transforming Received Categories: Discovering Cross-Border Identities and Other Subversive Activities”

The Race Traitor Project

In their award winning book Race Traitor, Garvey and Ignatiev state that “the key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race” (1996, p.10). Their position is guided by the principle, “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity” (p.10). The White race, they argue, can be abolished through acts of treason. They speak of “defecting from the White race,” “collapsing it,” exploding it,” and “breaking it apart” (p. 11). These acts of treason involve defying the rules of Whiteness by White people rejecting their racial identity and White privilege. The notion of abolition that they use relates to the way abolition was referred to during the antislavery era. Yudice explains the analogy as follows, “Just as some Northerners and Southerners abjured slavery, leading to its collapse by defecting from the status quo, so also will the defections from whiteness by some late-twentieth-century whites lead to the collapse of white supremacy” (1995, p. 271).

The “race traitor” position is highly problematic in many ways, nonetheless, it does offer insights into how White identity constitutes a crucial support to White supremacy.
(Winant, 1997). Giroux (1997) states that the attempt to confront the issue of White racial identity and to raise the question of when and why Whites are identified as White is one of the central contributions of the theoretical works of historians like David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev. “These scholars have done more than add a historical component to the discourse about whiteness; they have expanded and deepened the relevance of politicizing the debates about the interrelationship between whiteness and race” (Giroux, 1997, p. 290).

Although the term “race traitor” may capture how some of us, anti-racists feel in listening in on White conversations that we intend on subverting or analysing for our own purposes (Thompson, 1999), what remains problematic is that the new abolitionists do not articulate the ways in which we are to actually become race traitors. Without an explication of the process of “defecting from the White race” the “race traitor” stance, appealing at first glance, is not very useful and can be relegated to rhetoric. In other words, “defecting from the White race” is simply not achievable. Winant asks the crucial question, “But how is this rejection of whiteness to be accomplished?” (1997, p. 47). On a practical level, he reasons, where the personal is the political, one can try only to change one’s life and refuse to be complicit with White supremacy. However, he continues, on a deeper theoretical level problems arise inspite of the new abolitionists’ stand that race is a social construction. He states that the new abolitionists employ race as a social construction mainly to argue against the biologistic conceptions of race, but that they do not consider the complexities of what he calls racial formation. Winant makes the following point about the nature of the social construction of Whiteness:

Is the social construction of whiteness so flimsy that it can be repudiated by a mere act of political will, or even by widespread and repeated acts aimed at rejecting white privilege? I think not; whiteness may not be a legitimate cultural identity in the sense of having a discrete, “positive” content, but it is certainly an over-determined political and cultural identity, nonetheless, having to do with socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, ideologies of individualism, opportunity, and citizenship, and nationalism, etc. (1997, p. 48).
There are political and pedagogical problems that stem from the new abolitionists' core message that Whiteness is synonymous with domination and oppression. Giroux (1997) states that it is problematic to suggest that the only way White youth have of constructing a racial identity is to renounce their Whiteness, and argues that "Race increasingly matters as a defining principle of identity and culture as much for White students in the 1990s as for youth of colour in the 1970s and 1980s" (1997, p. 293). He contends that an increased awareness of Whiteness as power and privilege has left White youth with little opportunities to be both White and oppositional. White youth feel that their only options are to, either reject their Whiteness and adopt the identity of other cultural groups, such as White youth who identify with Black youth culture and call themselves "wiggers," or to bare the charge of White identity being equated to racism. The latter, of course, leads to paralyzing guilt. He states that "it becomes difficult for White youth to view themselves as both White and antiracist at the same time" (p. 294). Giroux advocates that White youth need to locate themselves within society and need opportunities to rearticulate Whiteness in terms of its hopes and possibilities. In this way, White youth can construct narratives of Whiteness that challenge White domination and oppression. Of course, Giroux's argument can be extended to include all White people, not just youth, who need space to create positive, anti-racist identities and live their lives in progressive ways.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the "race traitor" project is the theoretical unsoundness of advocating for the destruction of the White race. The theoretical underpinning of this stand is called into question in light of the crucial need to highlight the saliency of race in anti-racism work. Race must be analyzed as a distinguishing category in order to examine racist practices, processes, and structures. This is not to say that race is to be reified or to deny the complexity of racial formation. We must take account of our racially structured experiences, lives, and society, as well as critically examine the ways Whiteness
invests itself in racialized systems. The conflation of race and racism in the writings of the "race traitor" position is, therefore, very problematic. Racism needs to be eliminated, not the White race (Thompson, 1999.) The centering of race in anti-racism discourse and praxis, then, counters the institutional denial and marginalization of race. Rather than calling for the rejection of the White race, what is needed is an interrogation of Whiteness which leads to reworking and rethinking Whiteness in democratic, anti-racist ways.

Rodriguez (2000) also challenges the theoretical unsoundness of the "race traitor" position and states that it can be viewed as race erasure and can be considered something other than a radical project. He reasons that when the new abolitionists argue for the destruction of the White race, ironically, this position may, in fact support a conservative White agenda which seeks to deny the importance of race and obscure White privilege. Secondly, he argues that the call for the destruction of the White race will not dismantle White solidarity, as the new abolitionists propose, because of the conservative racial ideology many Whites adhere to which depicts Whites as the "new victims" in the labour market. Here, Whiteness is represented as under attack and is viewed as a liability, a disadvantage. Under this climate of anger and anxiety, Rodriguez reasons, "White people will rush to white solidarity in the reactionary attempt to rewrite, however skewed, a white identity that is "non negative" as well as engage in racial logics that offer up a disneyesque revisionism of cultural history (ie. of the history of racism and of race relations in the United States)" (p.13).

An additional problem with the "race traitor" position is that there is no allowance for an adequate exploration into the formative consciousness about Whiteness. To know that we have White privilege is not enough. In order to live our Whiteness in liberatory ways, we must ask ourselves what we will do with this knowledge, how we will use it to try to weaken a system based on conferred dominance. In addition, we cannot reject White privilege even if
we wanted to because it goes hand in hand with our membership in the “White club” which rewards people based on their skin colour (as well as other axes of difference). What we can do, however, is use our agency to actively work against White supremacy/racism.

Lastly, the “race traitor” project leaves little room for White people to work together as White people (Thompson, 1999). Demonizing White people is an easy trap to fall into, but one that is not very productive. As Scheurich reminds us, all Whites benefit from White privilege regardless of whether we are a “good” or a “bad” White (1993, p. 9). Further, building alliances with White people to work against White supremacy must involve an awareness that the issues are complex and take time to integrate (Thompson, 1999). Whites need to allow for the process of growth that is involved in becoming anti-racist activists. We can spur that growth, not by engaging in divisiveness, but rather by increasing our efforts to address the power and privilege of Whiteness and to critically examine our own racism. As hooks (1990) has reminded White people, one of the most important undertakings for us is to stop denying our own racism and begin the task of self-reflectively examining the workings of White racism. The leap forward, then, for us, as White people is to acknowledge our personal and collective responsibility and complicity in eradication racist structures and racialized practices.

The Process of Transformation

White Positionality

Kincheloe and Steinberg note that, “individuals cannot separate where they stand in the web of reality from what they perceive” (1998, p. 1). White positionality affects the social construction of our knowledge, our understandings of ourselves, our world, and our
perception of the racialized “Other.” These social constructions are deeply connected to histories of colonialism and imperialism which in turn are linked to the construction of our White identities. The way we have been taught to line up reality, understand life and creation, and construct knowledge, springs from Whiteness and will be very different from the reality, worldviews, and knowledges of people of colour.

Rodriguez (1998) argues that the point is not to separate ourselves from Whiteness or from Whites, but to be critically conscious of being rooted and positioned in Whiteness. This is part of disrupting and dismantling the powerful position Whiteness occupies as representing the normative state. In order to transform our consciousness we need to realize that what has been presented to us as objective truth is in fact, a culturally, socially, and politically constructed perspective. Further, we speak, think, and act from our Whiteness in multiple, complex and contradictory ways precisely because of the tremendous diversity that exists within Whiteness. As Stuart Hall has said, this means “a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture” (1996, p. 447).

Whites, of course, must develop a critical awareness of themselves as racialized subjects. This is an aspect of White identity that most of us are not used to examining. Tatum states that although we all have multiple identities, “... some dimensions of our identities are reflected more saliently than others - a distinction made apparent by the energy we invest in their examination” (1999, p. 60). As a Black woman, she explains, she has invested more time in thinking about what it means to be Black and female, in that order, than what it means to be heterosexual, able-bodied and middle class. This, she continues, is because these parts of her identity are most often reflected back to her as significant in the eyes of others. As Whites, most of us have invested little time in thinking about what it means to be White because it is reflected back to us by others as “normal”, in the same way that heterosexism is viewed as
part of the dominant paradigm.

Being from the dominant group we carry the legacy of racism with us and although we may be conscious that we are not responsible for our historical racist roots and that racist thought and ideology are not something we invented, our task is to reflect critically on our White positioning to deepen our understanding of the ways we are affected by and possibly invested in the very ideology of Whiteness we oppose. Richard Dyer has expressed the need to “make whiteness strange” (1997, p. 10). The act of “making whiteness strange” allows for the needed distancing of oneself from Whiteness, in order to critically examine what Whiteness is and what it does. This does not imply moral distancing but rather posits an examination of Whiteness to see the ways that we, ourselves are implicated in the structures that perpetuate and reproduce racism (Dei, 2000).

There is a need to decolonize our minds because the values and beliefs of White supremacy have been internalized by most Whites, and these, in turn, determine how Whites see and act in the world (hooks, 1989). Racist assumptions and thoughts will always be something that, as Whites, we struggle to overcome. Because of this, it is important to speak of them honestly and openly, and as a way of breaking the silence around White supremacy/racism. I echo Richard Dyer (1997) in saying that I did not invent racist thought, however, that I am affected by racist ideology needs to be stated. We need to constantly critique ourselves, our assumptions, our viewpoints, and our lives. When we begin to deconstruct the incongruity in the representations of self and “Other” in the media, and curricular material, and to see the contradictions in the lived realities between White people and people of colour through conversations, and books we read, then, the contours of White supremacy/racism are etched more clearly and deeply on our psyches.
Engaging the Tensions and the Contradictions in Our Lives

One afternoon I entered the small enclosed cubical outside of the bank to use the bank machine. A young Black man was there, with his back turned to me withdrawing money. Standing behind him, for one short moment, I froze with fear as I realized that we were alone and a feeling of certainty that I would be robbed overtook me. I was greatly relieved when he walked past me and exited the building. After withdrawing money, I exited and walked past the parking lot to see this same man getting into his car along side of his wife and two young children. The contradiction between my perception of this person as a criminal and the reality of him as a family man, the father of two young children, stunned me. I looked long and hard at him in an attempt to imprint this image on my mind.

I was flooded with emotion at that moment. I was angry at myself, and ashamed at the same time. I was seized by a desire to deny this experience, to disown it. Surfacing even stronger, however, was a need to know where this experience was rooted, and how it could be part of my psyche. I have male friends, I reasoned, who are Black and whom I have known for many years. They are devoted to their wives and children and are caring, sensitive individuals. Yet the image of the Black male as threatening, menacing, and evil, unexpectedly emerged from the recesses of my mind and took hold of me. This speaks, I believe to the powerful hold these racist images have on the White psyche and on our social, and collective unconscious through the perpetuation of representations of the Black male, in the media and White contemporary popular culture, as a violent person to be feared.

I tell this story to illustrate a point. I do not believe we can completely free ourselves from the legacy of racism, racist ideology, or our particular personal histories of being born White. Rodriguez emphasizes this concept when he states that he asks his undergraduate pre-service students to consider the following question, “Do you really think it is possible to step fully outside of the history of racism, to remove ourselves from the way this history has inscribed
itself on our bodies and in our very speech acts?" (1998, p. 43). This question, I believe, underscores the fact that there is no possibility for most of us to step outside of our White skin and, suddenly, be transformed. Issues of race, White supremacy/racism are complex, and deeply embedded in our everyday lives and social and political fabric.

Coming to see and know Whiteness is a process of transformation that unfolds over time, and involves a dialectical process of action and reflection on action. It is a process of becoming, that is, becoming more anti-racist and less racist. This is a life long process. Becky Thompson contends that we are in fact anti-racist racists. She states:

Because it is possible to oppose white supremacy and still receive unearned privileges as a white person, some of the group members refer to ourselves as "antiracist racists" - women who have journeyed from being conscious about our own racism to being activists who continue to challenge our own racism and white supremacy in general (1997, p. 357).

Exploring the contradictions and tensions in our lives involves engaging in both a rearticulation of Whiteness and a deconstruction of Whiteness simultaneously. It is through engaging with the tensions and contradictions in these two processes that an anti-racist identity can be created and recreated. We can envision liberatory paradigms of White subjectivity, be conscious of our political stand to move beyond dominating forms of Whiteness and engage in counter-hegemonic practices. Racism can no longer be read as individual acts of meanness but as how dominance has been conferred on us systematically (McIntosh, 1988). Seeing our own complicity, and how we have been affected by racism as well as sexism, classism, heterosexism, and homophobia is meant not to lead to paralysis but rather is meant to propel us forward in the development of critical self-reflexivity.

**Supporting Each Other on Our Journey of Awakening**

Kincheloe and Steinberg argue that framing Whiteness in rationalistic terms has its roots in colonial power. They state that in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western
Europe, the White, male subject was constructed around the notion of rationality. In this historical configuration Whiteness established itself as a norm in a hierarchical mode of thought. Encounters with Whiteness and non-Whiteness were represented in the following ways: “whiteness representing orderliness, rationality, and self-control and nonwhiteness indicating chaos, irrationality, violence, and the breakdown of self-regulation” (1998, p. 5). This notion of rationality, of the civilized and the uncivilized continues to be a dominant social force shaping cultural institutions such as schools, the media, and the church. Richard Dyer has described colonialism as “one of the elements that subtends the construction of the white identity” (1997, p. 14).

Not long ago, a friend and I saw the movie, The Cider House Rules in Toronto. The movie chronicles the life of a White boy who grows up in an orphanage in the United States. The doctor who runs the orphanage is a kind, eccentric old man, who performs abortions for distressed women who “have got themselves into trouble”. When the boy becomes a young man, he leaves the orphanage and works on a farm picking apples with other migrant workers who are Black. He falls in love with a young woman, blonde and beautiful, even though he knows she will not be his when her fiancee returns from the war. The story ends with the return of the fiancee, a war veteran in a wheel chair. The young woman stands by his side and our main protagonist/hero returns to the orphanage to continue the work of the recently deceased doctor and dedicates his life to the orphans. This is the main plot of the movie.

After the movie my friend remarked, “That was a good movie.” I replied, “You mean except for the racist ideology?” The portrayal of the Whites in the movie as virtuous and as being a morally superior breed was contrasted with the Blacks who were portrayed as violent, pathologized and I wouldn’t hesitate to say, morally decayed! Simultaneously, two thoughts flashed through my mind: that my friend, a White woman, was not conscious of the racist ideology in the movie and that some time ago, before I began my own interrogation of
Whiteness, I wondered if I would have noticed either. The racist ideology I am referring to is part of the ideology of Whiteness and refers to the institutionalized process of creating controlling images and assigning qualities that are attached to members of subordinate groups to justify their assigned, subordinate place. Assigning qualities and controlling images of Whites operate similarly, to justify their race privilege and domination.

I relate this story for a number of reasons which I would like to explain before looking at the subplot involving the Blacks in the movie. First, my friend’s annoyed reaction to my comment conveyed to me that I was ruining, or at least taking away from her enjoyment of the movie. Further, she hadn’t noticed the racist ideology or how Whiteness was constructed in benevolent terms while watching this movie. Furthermore, she was not interested in hearing what I had to say about this.

Recently, my friend remarked that she would not discuss Black and White issues with me. When I asked her why this was, she mentioned a fear of saying something that could be perceived as politically incorrect. I feel only sadness when I think of this conversation now because our friendship has ended and also because I believe that Thompson (1999) has hit on a very crucial point. She states that as Whites, we must support each other on our journey of awakening. I ask myself now, why I was not able to pass on what I know about whiteness in a way that didn’t make my friend feel inadequate and totally shut down.

Let’s go back to the subplot of the movie. When the migrant Black workers arrive to pick apples, they move into the barracks on the farm. The Black leader of the workers has to settle disputes between some of the men who pull out knives and break into violent fights. This migrant leader has a teenage daughter and, as the plot unfolds, we discover that she has been “visited upon” by her father at night and is pregnant and distressed. Our young protagonist/hero performs an abortion for her. She leaves the farm, but not before violently killing her father.
The reviewing of this movie, I believe, stands as an example of the ideology of Whiteness in a cultural form which has its roots in colonialism. Many scholars have written about the White construction of the “Other” serving the function of defining and illuminating the White subject, Said (1978), hooks (1990), Dyer (1997), and Morrison (1992) to name a few. Winant states that Whiteness is a relational concept and that “whiteness is unintelligible without reference to nonwhites” (1997, p. 48). In this movie, the violence, disorder, and depravity of the Black community serves the function of contrast: like a foil against which the White community shines; so virtuous are their motives; the blond beauty is willing to devote her life to her crippled war veteran fiancée and our protagonist/hero moves back to the orphanage to devote his life to the young orphans.

Developing an Anti-Racist White Consciousness

Engaging in critical consciousness through dissecting and unraveling the power of Eurocentric hegemony is intrinsically intertwined with rethinking Whiteness in liberatory ways. Our task is to see White supremacy/racism and acknowledge that we benefit from it, inspite of other oppressions that we may experience and to understand that White supremacy/racism is cemented at cultural and institutional levels (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999). We use this critical awareness to interrupt, and actively resist White racial privilege in our work places and in our daily lives. At the same time we come to know the varied ways that people from diverse backgrounds construct knowledge and understand themselves, their world, and their encounters and experiences with Whiteness.

Christine Clark and James O'Donnell in Becoming and Unbecoming White: Owning and Disowning a Racial Identity have compiled autobiographical narratives which, through critical and reflective analysis on the part of the mainly White authors, highlight factors that encouraged anti-racist White consciousness to come about. They identify several thematic
strands which run throughout the narratives and summarize as follows:

To persist in being racist we had to believe the following:
1. Racism is a pathology of the individual racist only, not a function of a racist culture and political structure.
2. Whiteness is “normal” and “American.”
3. People of color are “Other” and as such are “abnormal” and “deficit.”
4. Eurocentric schooling taught the absolute “truth.”

To become antiracist we had to do the following:
1. Be exposed to educational experiences (books, newspapers, films, speakers, and so forth) outside the Eurocentric norm.
2. Engage with people of color in books, in newspapers, in films, and in person by chance in public spaces, in alternative classrooms, and so forth.

In her autobiographical narrative, Becky Thompson candidly discusses her transformation as a White anti-racist activist. She highlights coming to terms with her complicity in racism and her anti-racism activism. Thompson posits the importance of the psychological models of racial identity development theory in transforming her consciousness about Whiteness. While recognizing that these theories are limited because they are ahistorical, compartmentalized, and linear, she stresses that she recognizes the importance of racial identity development in sociological terms when the focus is on social process and not the individual. She holds that social movements - art, music, politics, friendships and alliances can move people into new levels of consciousness (1999, p. 71).

She describes her transformation as developing over four stages that show the importance of the social and political movements of the times. The beginning stage she describes as the “I am not a racist stage.” In this stage, she describes attending a class on “The Black Experience” and describes the resistance she displayed outwardly during that class. After reading works by scholars of colour and participating in community activism she entered what she describes as the “I don’t want to be White stage.” This stage is characterized by a
rejection of herself as a White person and a need to distance from other White people. She sought the company of people of colour and desired to learn from them, while at the same time fearing that her own racist constructs would lead to her alienation.

The next stage of her racial identity she characterizes as the "grappling for a steady positon." This period of her life was during the late 1970s and early 1980s when identity politics began to shape feminist political organizations. She describes the limitations of essentialist thinking that dominated this period of time which resulted in a "jockeying for authority based on one's belonging to a subordinate group" (1999, p. 67). She notes that under this construct White lesbian women had more "oppression privilege" (p. 67) than straight White women and women of colour were "higher up the ladder" than White women. Given these dynamics, Thompson relates that she and other White women were trying to find ways to proceed with anti-racism activism.

Her racial identity evolved as she became more comfortable confronting racism and as she began to make the distinction between "identity politics and informed consciousness" (p. 67). There was an acceptance of herself and other White people as she actively sought out relationships with other White anti-racists and began to read scholarly works by White anti-racists. She states, "If I was to describe what my life feels and looks like now, in terms of race and racism--a task that is much more difficult to do in relation to the present than retrospectively--I would say that antiracism and multiculturalism have become the centerpiece of my life. That reality plays itself out in all areas of my life: at home, in the neighborhood, in my writing, and in my teaching" (p. 68).

**White Racial Identity Development**

Janet Helms's (1995) model of White racial identity development has been used by Tatum (1999) to understand the responses of White students in her anti-racism classes for years.
Helms’s model, I believe is a useful tool for understanding White racial identity as a developmental process, but also has major limitations. I will briefly summarize the six stages or what she terms “statuses” that characterize a White person’s patterns of responding to racial situations in his or her environment. Then I will examine the usefulness and limitations of such a theory.

In the first status, Contact, Whiteness is seen as “normal,” privileges are taken for granted and Whiteness is not a consciously thought about part of identity. A move to the second status, Disintegration, is frequently brought on by contact with people of colour or with new information which heightens awareness of White racial privilege and racism. Emotions, such as guilt, anger, and sadness often accompany this stage. The next status is Reintegration. Here, feelings of anger and blame may surface towards people of colour. There is resistance and avoidance in dealing with the uncomfortableness of struggling with the issues of racism. The fourth status is called Pseudoindependence. An intellectual awareness of the unfairness of racism and a responsibility to work to end it distinguishes this stage. A desire to seek out actively people of colour and to disassociate from White people may mark this stage. Pivotal to the fifth status, Immersion/Emersion, is a desire on the part of Whites to redefine who they are and to ask questions related to what it means to be White. Here, information and the company of other White allies is pursued. The last status described by Helms is called Autonomy. A positive White identity is achieved in this stage, characterized by commitment to antiracist activity, on-going, critical and reflective analysis, and increased effectiveness in cross-racial interactions.

Tatum (1999) discusses the usefulness of Helms’s theory by emphasizing that the statuses are best seen as “habits of mind”, rather than sequential, fixed stages. The problem occurs, she says, when they are used rigidly, as a diagnostic tool. The usefulness of Helms’s identity development theory, Tatum argues, lies in helping to analyze the different ways that White
people respond when thinking about their own racial identity and that of others. For example, whether or not someone takes the "colour blind" position, where the person is described as having done little reflection on race or is distancing him/herself from White people, or is "blaming the victim" gives an indication of their inner motives. Thompson adds that, "This psychological research has helped interpret complicated racial dynamics in the classroom, in organizations, and in counseling" (1999, p. 69). Helms's identity development theory, however, has major limitations. It is a linear and static approach that denies the dynamic aspect of identity development (Tatum, 1999). Thompson (1999) critiques Helms's racial identity theory as being ahistorical and simplistic. She states that these psychological models examine individual motives but "leave little room for understanding how social movements and political activism shape racial identity ... Identities are tied to history, as informed by multiple identities, as overlapping, and often nonsequential" (pp. 69-70).

**Borderland Consciousness**

Given that identities are not static but constantly changing, they can not be compartmentalized as in Helms's identity development theory. They are also very complex, being shaped by familial, historical, social, and political contexts. Identities are "constructed, negotiated, fluid, and dialogic" (Wellman, 1999, p. 85). The concept of self is multidimensional, multifaceted, and "one that is not completely bound by blood line, nationality, occupation, or biology" (p. 88). In "Transforming Received Categories: Discovering Cross-Border Identities and Other Subversive Activities," David Wellman writes of how his main identity when growing up, was shaped by the political activity of his parents. Because his parents were "out" Communists in the McCarthy era, his, and his family's main identity were as the Reds. This meant that growing up, other White kids marginalized him and that he was treated differently and disparagingly by his teachers. He states that he never
experienced his Whiteness as taken for granted, normal, or invisible. He describes his childhood as sharing nothing with his White classmates, except for the colour of his skin. His associations and friendships were developed with the Black students in his neighborhood where he was judged not by the colour of his skin but by his behaviour. He states, “I knew who I was not: not - Black and not - White. I did not belong in either category. I was none-of-the-above; the one whose racial identity had no name” (1999, p. 85).

David Wellman’s autobiographical writing attests to the multiple ways that Whiteness can be constructed. His story reminds us of Tatum’s observation that although we have multiple identities, “some dimensions of our identities are reflected more saliently than others” (1999, p. 60). The part of Wellman’s identity that was most significantly reflected back to him in his early years, was his parent’s politics. Wellman states, “using today’s language, we were raced as Red. We were not treated like White people. We were the Reds” (1999, p. 70). He states that he did not discover his class identity growing up in the Claremount neighbourhood of Detroit because everyone was working class and in this sense class was normalized. He contends that it was not until he moved to bourgeois, and all-White Berkley, California that he constructed a sense of self based on his working class roots.

Although Wellman did not have the language to explain and understand his racial identity in his formative years, he now describes himself as a “border” person and the all-Black neighbourhood where he grew up as a “borderland.” He describes borderlands as being “those unintentional, multicultural spaces - sometimes called ‘common ground’ - where disparate cultures meet; where the people living on these peripheries discover cultural parallels and construct new as well as variable identities, based on-although neither reducible nor limited to - the old ones” (p. 85). He does not view his experience as an isolated one, rather sees it as part of a broader process of transformation which explains how different people can construct identities based on a common heritage.
Wellman describes another key aspect to "practicing borderland consciousness" (p. 89). He explains that occupying this space means that we are truly in-between; belonging to neither side. We do not fit in. The dues that this kind of border crossing demands are heavy because we are not completely accepted, never trusted and always suspect by either side. In this sense, we are always on the outside. Thompson's phrase, "anti-racist racists" also captures the contradiction that encapsulates our lives. But, as Wellman reminds us, we do have privilege and choice. We have the choice to live on borders or not, and we have privilege that people of colour do not have.

Wellman argues that border crossing challenges the status quo and is "a profoundly subversive activity" (p. 90). He states:

It radically disrupts key elements of American culture: Conventional understandings of propriety, reason, rationality, and harmony are subverted by border crossers as they move between epistemological, cultural, political, and methodological boundaries. But the most important convention that gets disrupted is the American propensity to create dualisms, to manufacture dichotomies, to generate a binary, zero-sum (you win - I lose) culture. Border crossing identities assault the racial dualisms in American culture. It is no surprise, then, that border crossers are as threatening to White Americans as cross-dressers are to heterosexuals (p. 91).

Kincheloe and Steinberg, however, add a word of caution to exploring cultural borders. They state that border crossing needs to be politically and morally grounded as well as connected critically to notions of social justice. They argue that the border crosser can become an agent of the dominant culture without a commitment to anti-racism and use their knowledge in a way that subverts justice (1998, p. 25).

The discussions and debates around rearticulating Whiteness are important ones and those addressed here, are by no means exhaustive. It is crucial for Whites, I believe, to see that they have a stake in the politics of rearticulating Whiteness. Whites need to engage with the complexities and the rootedness of Whiteness as a social construction, and continue to
deconstruct Whiteness as dominance, yet at the same time we must not lose sight of imagining and reworking Whiteness in progressive, democratic ways. When we ask ourselves, "What can Whiteness do?", we must not be limited by history or by social reality but continue to work to transform our consciousness, striving to be anti-racist and to change a system, based on dominance and oppression in more democratic ways (Rodriguez, 1998).
Chapter 4

Constructing Pedagogies of Whiteness

Michael Apple (1998) asserts that although studying Whiteness allows for the understanding of power differentials and the racing of all people, we should be cognizant of certain dangers and tensions in Whites focusing on Whiteness. He cautions that unless we are very careful and reflexive, we may, in fact, still end up privileging the White middle-class person’s need for self-display. He warns that “... we must be on our guard to ensure that a focus on whiteness doesn’t become one more excuse to recenter dominant voices and to ignore the voices and testimony of those groups of people whose dreams, hopes, lives, and very bodies are shattered by current relations of exploitation and domination” (1998, p. xi). We must remind ourselves that the study of Whiteness, is driven by a larger, liberatory project which joins Whites with people of colour, as well as other oppressed groups (women, gays and lesbians, disabled and so on) in a common vision and struggle: working for social change and transformation that will have real life consequences in terms of more equitable redistribution of power, wealth, and resources.

This chapter examines and explores critical pedagogies of Whiteness and is organized around some of the predominant ideas and themes that have emerged from empirical studies and theoretical writings on Whiteness (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; ; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998). I ask two interrelated questions. First, “Given that there can be many possible pedagogies of Whiteness which may take many different directions, what are the key components involved in a study of Whiteness?” Here, I am seeking to find out more about the general framework or the themes and ideas that provide the scaffolding for pedagogies of Whiteness, even though they are culturally and historically contingent. Posing this question in another way, I ask, “What do educators need to
critically understand about Whiteness in order to successfully engage students in a study of Whiteness?" Successful student engagement is contingent on providing students with opportunities to decolonize their minds and develop critical consciousness, thus enabling the development of positive White identities. Paulo Freire speaks of conscientizacao, or conscientization, as occurring when people "achieve a deepened awareness both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality" (1985, p. 93). A second question which links to the first is, "What pedagogical tools can be used by educators to enable students to interrogate Whiteness, given its complex and contradictory nature and to facilitate transformation?"

Serious discussions about pedagogies of Whiteness are still very much in an infancy stage, and scholars remain cognizant of the dangers of the contradictory effects of having Whites focus on Whiteness (Apple, 1998), nonetheless, critical scholars of White studies are unanimous in stressing the vital importance of engaging in academic dialogues and debates about Whiteness. By engaging in both a critical and reflexive interrogation of Whiteness, critical White studies can be used by educators to contribute to transformative educational agendas and practices. The vision which drives Whites to engage in a study of Whiteness needs to be based on ideals of social transformation. As Whites transform themselves, they join the struggle for racial justice and seek to redistribute power and resources along more equitable lines. At the same time scholars advocating pedagogies of Whiteness remain aware of the tension between deconstructing Whiteness within its hegemonic dimensions on the one hand and, on the other hand, providing opportunities for Whites to refigure their own identities based on a sense of hope (Giroux, 1997). Looking for ways to move Whites beyond negative emotions such as guilt and shame to enable the formation of progressive, anti-racist identities appeared as a common theme in these scholarly writings (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998).
Key Components of Pedagogies of Whiteness

The race traitor position of opting out of one’s Whiteness cannot be an option presented to White students. We cannot renounce our Whiteness as part of our racial identity anymore than we can renounce our race privilege. As Kincheloe and Steinberg state, “No matter how vociferously they may renounce their whiteness, white people do not lose the power associated with being white” (1997, p. 22). What we can do is rearticulate and rework our Whiteness as we engage in a process of deconstructing Whiteness. This process involves making a continuous effort to live out our Whiteness in progressive ways. Rodriguez states, “... white students must engage in the process of identity formation by simultaneously critically examining whiteness in its historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts” (2000, p. 17). A dialectical approach to the study of Whiteness, therefore, must be part of any pedagogy of Whiteness. A dialectical approach will ensure that Whiteness is not equated to dominance only but that the transformative possibilities of Whiteness are also explored and mapped out. In this way, White students move beyond paralyzing guilt and are left with a sense of hope and a sense of agency. As an example, an exploration which shows White people and people of colour working together throughout history will help students to envision collective projects that provide opportunities to work together for equality in schools, communities, and in the larger society.

Any attempt to rethink Whiteness, however, must have an element of unsettlement, bafflement or trauma (Rodriguez, 1998). When this concept is present, students are pushed to think critically by connecting past injustices to the present situation in order to work towards more progressive and democratic forms of Whiteness. Students are also pushed to interrogate the normatively of Whiteness and to view its oppressive dimensions. Again this is unsettling, and perhaps even traumatizing. Consider for example, the claim made by Thompson that those of us who are committed to anti-racism are anti-racist racists (1997). This is a very unsettling
claim for Whites because it keeps us in a state of awareness about the contradictions and tensions in our lives. That is we oppose racism, on the one hand, and yet are the recipients of White privilege on the other hand.

The construction of critical pedagogies of Whiteness expands the anti-racism discourse and praxis by providing further insights for identifying the educational institute as a social hegemonic force that is linked to the politics of oppression. Thus, the study of Whiteness pushes the anti-racism debates in a critical direction (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 16). It does this by making Whiteness part of the focus of study, with the express understanding that strategically Whiteness has maintained its dominance precisely by remaining outside of our understandings of race and racial politics. “Leaving whiteness ‘untapped’ is in part how it maintains its dominance” (p. 17). Pedagogies of Whiteness then, can make significant contributions to the production of knowledge for social action and to the project of rethinking schooling.

Pedagogies of Whiteness challenge educational institutes to move beyond simply being inclusive - that is, adding on “a bit of colour,” as the multicultural approach does, to adopting a critical framework. The multicultural approach may be a well-meaning approach used by educators, however, it is a hegemonic project that perpetuates the status quo. Although I do not want to get side tracked into critiquing the multicultural approach at this point, it is important for educators to understand that focusing on “holidays and heroes” is not transformative education (Dei, 2000; Lee, 1998). Multicultural education, as practiced in Canadian schools perpetuates the status quo because a White supremacist discourse continues to be disseminated which views the racialized “Other” in stereotypical ways and culture as fixed and static. As long as a colonial lens continues to be used, the knowledge and imagery presented in schools will remain very destructive to minoritized youth. White youth are affected negatively, as well, albeit, differently because they are inculcated with white supremacist ideology and prevented from developing positive White identities and becoming
effective allies to people of colour.

Pedagogies of Whiteness which deconstruct and rearticulate Whiteness are oppositional and counter-hegemonic in their challenge of the status quo. The nexus between knowledge production and power necessitates an analysis of the legacy of colonialism, and imperialism as they have played themselves out historically and contemporaneously. This interrogation of the power of Whiteness highlights the ways it is secured, interrupted and transformed. Rodriguez states:

First, by bringing into multicultural education a critical analysis of whiteness, it becomes almost impossible not to discuss such matters as social inequality, exclusion, racism, and oppression as part of the story of whiteness. Indeed, raising questions about whiteness often leads to an understanding of it above and beyond simply highlighting it as another form of racial difference. Second, by discussing the politics of rearticulating whiteness, especially within the context of deconstructing it, serious racial concerns arise as white students are made aware of the issues at stake in living out their whiteness progressively in the name of racial justice. From this perspective, they are invited to consider what they can do with their whiteness in light of the broader project of expanding democratic possibilities (2000, p. 18).

Whiteness is not monolithic and clearly there are many varieties of Whiteness and many ways to be White. Pedagogies of Whiteness are likewise, multiple and vary across space, time, and context. Identities are overlapping and intersecting, and White people can be simultaneously oppressors and oppressed (Friere, 1997 b). Thus, critical reflexivity and an interrogation of our own location within Whiteness is needed. Kincheloe and Steinberg state, “The diversity among white people makes sweeping generalizations about them dangerous and highly counterproductive to the goals of a critical pedagogy of whiteness. Indeed, it is not contradictory to argue that whiteness is a marker of privilege but all white people are not able to take advantage of that privilege” (2000, p. 182). Thus, pedagogies of Whiteness must take into account the multivariant forms of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and abilism (among other axes of difference) and address the complexity and contradictory way that
Whiteness can be experienced and lived. Further, any curricula developed must focus in an indepth way on the relational aspect of the intersections of oppressions and the way that power and difference is experienced and played out in the larger society.

Whiteness is fluid, has multiple boundaries and is situationally specific. It changes over space and time and as it encounters new contexts. Whiteness is always shifting, and always “reinscribing itself around changing meanings of race in the larger society” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 5). Whiteness needs to be contextualized and placed in a historical framework. Pedagogies of Whiteness then, are reinvented and recreated depending on specific situations. They are not fixed, and they can not be universalized. Likewise, there is no prescribed way of approaching the teaching about Whiteness. The words of Paulo Friere apply here. He discusses how to approach democratic education, “History is always a possibility and not fixed or predetermined. Also, the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context” (1997, p. 308). Pedagogies of Whiteness must be thought of in the same context, not prescribed formulas to be adopted but creative, critical, and reflexive endeavours that depend on the particular political demands of the specific situation.

At the same time, we must recognize that the study of Whiteness is an evolving field of knowledge and so likewise are pedagogies of Whiteness to be thought of as evolving studies, not fixed and frozen. In addition, educators must understand and make sense of pedagogies of Whiteness within their own cultural and historical contexts. In this way they are involved in what Paulo Friere refers to as “reading the world.” Whites need to see Whiteness as a social construction, as a position representing power and privilege. The powerful position that Whiteness occupies as pervasive normativity needs to be interrogated. White people are racialized and their experiences which are presented as the standard do need to be examined.
As Kincheloe and Steinberg state, "whiteness needs to be denormalized" (1998, p. 5).

**Denormalizing Whiteness**

One of the most predominant themes explored by scholars of critical White studies is the pervasive normativity of Whiteness. Frankenberg argues that "whiteness does have content inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and others, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself" (1993, p. 231). A study of Whiteness then, needs to critically examine the normative discourses of Whiteness which function to make things appear natural and normal and result in their socially and politically constructed nature never being questioned (Rodriguez, 1998). Rodriguez builds on Frankenberg’s position by arguing that one way of interrupting the "so there-everywhere position" of Whiteness is to name its socially constructed norms. In this way, we can ‘get at’ the content of Whiteness and interrogate its underpinnings and work to transform it in progressive ways. In this section I will examine the unmasking of Whiteness as an unracial category to explore the racialness of our experiences, and then examine knowledge as ideology rather than objective fact. Lastly, I will explore Rodriguez’s (1998) concept of Whiteness as a normalizing technology that sustains the production of socially constructed norms and standards.

1.) **Unmasking Whiteness as an Unracial Category**

Most of us, as Whites, have spent the majority of our lives aware of ourselves in terms of many dimensions of our identity, for example, our sexuality, gender, class, ethnicity and religion. We have explored how these aspects have shaped our thoughts, our struggles and our lives. In contrast, not many of us as Whites have critically reflected on ourselves as racial beings. Most of us, in fact, do not view ourselves as having a racial makeup at all, rather we
define ourselves in terms of our ethnicity and equate our ethnicity to race (Sleeter, 1996). So, for example, I have viewed myself as being of Scottish and English heritage, even though I am a second generation Canadian but I have not until recently considered the meaning of Whiteness in my own life.

Whiteness has been that unexamined, elusive part of ourselves which has remained very much taken for granted, unquestioned and normalized. However, if we continue to remain unconscious of ourselves as racial beings, of our race privilege and power and of the normalization of Whiteness, we will continue to live out our lives in oppressive ways. Deconstructing the normalization of Whiteness, then, is crucial work to learning to speak democratically from Whiteness. Film critic, Richard Dyer articulately addresses the powerful position of Whiteness in his study, *White*:

There is no more powerful position than that of being “just” human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that—they can only speak for their race. But, nonraced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racedness of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequalities, oppression, privileges, and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in the world (1997, p. 2).

Pedagogies of Whiteness, then, focus on unmasking Whiteness as an unracial category and address the powerful position of speaking universally for everyone. An interrogation of the oppressiveness of this stance for those whose lives are defined by difference needs to be exposed. White people need to realize that before they can understand a perspective that is different from their own, they must grasp that their own experiences can not be universalized.

Understanding ourselves as racialized beings means we “see” that we speak only for Whiteness. If we do not see the racialness of our experiences, we will continue to live out our Whiteness oppressively and will not understand perspectives that are different from our own. Monture-Angus, states, “Viewing life, even momentarily, from a perspective other than your own is necessary if members of the mainstream are ever going to understand the complexities

The issue of Whites speaking universally for all people has been an on-going and contentious debate that continues to be brought forward by feminists of colour to White feminists. Scholars of colour such as Hazel Carby (1982), bell hooks (1990), and Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992) have called for an overall transformation of feminism to be inclusive of all women, address diverse standpoints and experiences fully and inclusively. They, among other minoritized scholars argue that White feminists need to interrogate the location from which they speak by deconstructing the category “women.” Feminists of colour argue that their experiences are fundamentally different from the experiences of White women. Carby, for example, asserts that it is the Black woman who needs to tell her own “herstories”, through her lived reality. She stresses that the diversity among Black women makes it impossible to represent all of their voices as there is no monolithic, homogenous Black identity and experience.

More is needed, however, then simply understanding that White womens’ experiences are different from those of the minoritized. A critical engagement in the meaning of whiteness begins with an acknowledgement that we benefit unfairly from systems of oppression such as colonialism and imperialism. Frankenberger states, “... it became clear that white feminist women accounting for our experience were missing its “racialness” and that we were not seeing what was going on around us: in other words, we lacked an awareness of how our positions in society were constructed in relation to those of women- and men- of color” (1993, p. 2). Our task is to explore the links between feminism and racism to investigate the ways White women can be simultaneously oppressor and oppressed.

Understanding that we speak for Whiteness and that our experiences can not be universalized means that as Whites, we need to learn to listen in a new way. Paulo Friere states that one of the fundamental issues involved in any critical dialogue is the ability to
listen. He states that we need to become “students of listening” (1997, p. 306). This he argues, “implies a certain treatment of silence and the intermediary moments of silence. Those who speak democratically need to silence themselves so that the voice of those who must be listened to is allowed to emerge” (p. 306). Monture-Angus delivers this same message to Whites. She asks, “When are those of you who inflict racism, who appropriate pain, who speak with no knowledge or respect when you ought to know to listen and accept, going to take a hard look at yourself instead of me? (1995, p. 21). Taking a hard look at ourselves involves examining our ability to speak and listen democratically.

A White male commented in one of my courses recently that overt racial incidences such as name calling do not happen anymore. How, of course, can he have any authority on such an issue when it is not within his realm of experience. As hooks reminds us, “A member of a privileged group cannot “interpret” the reality of members of a less powerful, exploited, and oppressed group” (1990, p. 55). An African-Canadian male educator painfully related to me his experiences in the classroom where teenaged White students were drawing swastikas on their Math textbooks. He experienced this as outward acts of hostility and racism. He received little support from his White colleagues and administrator which resulted in his deciding to take a leave of absence from teaching rather than finish the school year. Stories, such as this, are not unusual but rather are the norm in our school system. In addition, we need to rethink what constitutes a racial incident. If we are to denormalize Whiteness and to see its racialness then we need to recognize that all of our experiences are racialized, albeit differently. Therefore, the privileged treatment of White people constitutes racial experiences, as well.

A second component of being “a student of listening” involves acknowledging our power to silence voices that need to be heard. A friend who works for the Ontario Public Interest Group at a local university related an incident that illustrates this point. An indigenous woman along with my friend wanted to bring in a series of indigenous speakers based on the Seventh
Generation Prophecy as an opportunity to privilege an indigenous worldview and history. An OPIRG worker, a White male, opposed this idea by saying that it is just another speaker series, no different from any other and therefore in his estimation not activist enough. Failing to see the significance of privileging silenced voices entails failing to understand the connection to history of White silencing and the large scale destruction and erasure of indigenous knowledge in the world. It also involves failing to see that it is the White voice which is heard, and White stories which are privileged and told over and over again. Therefore, the message for us as Whites is that not only do we need to silence ourselves in order to listen to the silenced voices, but we also need to recognize the power we have to silence. This White male OPIRG worker, situated in an institute of higher learning and in an organization committed to social justice issues was in a position to prevent a forum on indigenous knowledge to take place and was unconscious of the crucial need to bring indigenous knowledges into the center, not to appropriate this knowledge but as a way of privileging indigenous voices, stories, and histories. Friere states, “this understanding of the power to silence implies the development of the ability to listen to the silenced voices so as to then begin to look for ways - tactical, technical, methodological ways - that could facilitate the process of reading the silenced word that is in a close relationship with the lived world of the students” (p. 306). Providing a speaker series which privileges indigenous knowledge is indeed not just another speaker series, rather it is a very political act and intricately connected to activism. As a word of caution, indigenous knowledge can be co-opted and appropriated and therefore, as such can become hegemonic rather than resistance activities.

Seeing ourselves as racial beings involves understanding positionality and our own particularities in terms of being White. We speak from Whiteness with the knowledge that there is great diversity within and among Whiteness. Yet as Kincheloe and Steinberg state, “Positionality involves the notion that since our understanding of the world and ourselves is socially constructed, we must devote special attention to the differing ways individuals from
diverse social backgrounds construct knowledge and make meaning" (1998, p. 3). When we understand the social construction of ourselves and our world, then the notions of objectivity and neutrality no longer hold any substance. What was previously thought of as neutral and objective becomes exposed as a White perspective, a White stand-point. The next section addresses the need to question the relationship between knowledge production and power.

2.) Knowledge as Ideology

An interrogation of the nexus between knowledge production and power leads to questioning what constitutes the corpus of “legitimate” knowledge. The knowledge which is perpetuated and legitimated in schools is the White middle-class patriarchal worldview presented as one truth, one way, and one knowledge. Certain epistemologies have been privileged, while less powerful epistemologies are silenced. This knowledge base is presented as objective, universal, and apolitical and needs to be contested (Dei, 1997). The curriculum validates particular points of view and is normalized by being presented as rational and reasoned facts. However, Whiteness needs to be interrogated as having the power to define and represent the world, self, and “Other.” Rodriguez states, “An examination...of the nexus between power and knowledge in the curriculum might reveal how normative discourses, as found in mainstream curricula, signal attempts by power blocs to socialize students and teachers to accept and validate particular ways of knowing and being” (1998, p. 35).

Knowledge needs to be understood as ideology, as thoughts, and ideas which are shaped and molded by perspectives and not as objective and rational facts (Rodriguez, 1998). Part of the work of challenging the authority of Whiteness is in linking Whiteness to history and in engaging in “active memory work.” This involves an interrogation of the link between the politics of forgetting and White discourses (p. 33). This of course involves fully exploring the myths perpetuated by White supremacy and the way that its version of history has been distorted to uphold itself. As Rodriguez states, “whiteness often maintains historical amnesia”
Consider the following story. My children and I visited a large plantation in North Carolina for the first time last summer. Our visit was spurred by my desire to learn about slave revolts, and the struggles of Black slaves to free themselves from slavery. I can only smile somewhat embarrassingly now when I think of my own naivety because what we encountered on the plantation tour erased history from the perspective of the Black’s struggles and instead spoke to the power of Whiteness to construct history on its own terms. The fact that the plantation had undergone a “beautification project” with the building of extensive gardens and natural wildlife grounds contrasted to the historical cruelty and inhuman plantation life of the past. Every attempt was made to obliterate any memory of actual historical events and to sanitize the past, and paint Whiteness in benevolent hues. For example, when we toured a home of a slave there was a large plague which informed us that before we felt sorry for the slaves that lived in this log cabin with its dirt floor, we should remember that the first presidents of the United States, such as Abraham Lincoln were born in a log cabin no different than this constructed replica.

During a tour of the plantation grounds we were told a story about “a loyal slave and a benevolent master” which again constructed Whiteness in benevolent terms. The story related that during the American Civil War, the owner of the plantation had to flee to the North before his plantation was taken over by the invading troops from the North. Before the owner left, however, he buried his household treasures telling only his chief slave of their whereabouts. When the plantation was invaded by the Yankee troops, this same slave refused to tell where the treasures were buried, even on threat of his life. When the troops left the plantation this slave traveled North to find his master to assure him of the safety of his treasures.

This story clearly illustrates the politically and socially constructed nature of a White version of history which functions to obliterate the cruelty and terror of slavery and sanitize
history, while at the same time propping up White supremacy. The voices, stories and history of the minoritized must be listened to by the dominant group. Privileging these voices would involve talking about genocide, residential schools, and racist government policies and practices that have been destructive to the minoritized. Mainstream history textbooks need to include the teaching of subjugated knowledges and histories which have been silenced and pathologized by the dominant.

3.) **Whiteness as a Normalizing Technology**

In his essay “Emptying the Content of Whiteness: Toward an Understanding of the Relation between Whiteness and Pedagogy” Rodriguez (1998) argues that the concept of the normativity of Whiteness can be expanded beyond the notion of race. He holds that Whiteness can be thought of as a “normalizing technology” that “aids in the production and maintenance of socially constructed standards and norms” (p. 36). He argues that Whiteness oppresses difference along many axes, not just race. He states that Whiteness as a normative discourse oppresses groups that fall outside of the dominant culture because they attempt to “neutralize and even obliterate difference” (1998, 33). Rodriguez writes as a gay, White male and argues that in schools, as in the larger society as a whole, heterosexism is presented as the pervasive norm. The “myth of heterosexism” is perpetuated by the school, as the superior way to experience sexuality and is oppressive to those who fall outside of its parameters. Rodriguez quotes actor/screenwriter Harvey Fierstein who shares the difficulties this school experience entailed for him, “All the reading I was given to do in school was heterosexual. Every movie I saw was heterosexual, and I had to do this translation. I had to translate it to my life rather than seeing my life” (1998, p. 32).

It is worth, I believe, expanding on the oppressiveness of heterosexism as normativity in the school system for three reasons. First, I believe it is important for educators to understand that any pedagogy of Whiteness must be thought of as critical and therefore, must address the
issue of power and the interconnectedness of systems of privilege and oppression. Whiteness needs to be envisioned in anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-sexist ways. Educators who take the position that they do not agree with gay and lesbian lifestyles because it is not an accepted part of their culture or their religion or because they do not envision it as part of their struggle must reflect on the oppressiveness of this position for the gay and lesbian community. To be committed to fighting racism but not homophobia is a very divisive stand and one that needs to be rethought. Maintaining that one’s culture or one’s religion doesn’t accept homosexuality and therefore allowing the multi-layered silencing and the hate and violence directed towards the gay and lesbian community to remain unchallenged is a very dangerous and intolerable position to take.

Secondly, the oppressiveness of heterosexism, as Foucault reminds us is one of the last socially acceptable prejudices or stupidities (Ristock & Taylor, 1998). Until recently, serious discussion of inequality based on sexual orientation in the school system has been ignored in the social analyses of diversity, equity, and power in education (Friend, 1993). However, the urgency in bringing heterosexism and homophobia into the equity arena can no longer be ignored both in terms of the negative impact on gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual youth who are the targets of homophobia and heterosexism and in terms of the negative impact on heterosexual youth who to a large extent are the perpetrators of anti-gay violence. Clearly, to address issues of race and racism in the classroom, but not issues relating to sexual orientation and homophobia presents itself as an intolerable contradiction that needs to be addressed.

Thirdly, very few heterosexual people have critically interrogated heterosexism as an oppressive system and thus the power of heterosexism has escaped critical scrutiny. This has to do with the powerful position of normativity that it holds. In much the same way that the colour blind discourse attempts to drain Whiteness of its power and of its history, by stating that I am just White and you are just Black” so too the discourse surrounding the normativity of heterosexism is drained of its power and of its history. Interrogating heterosexism is
therefore, a counterhegemonic act and needs to be part of any pedagogy of Whiteness. Its power and also its role in history must be interrogated. This is all part of the critical memory work that must accompany any pedagogy of Whiteness. Friend defines heterosexism as “the belief that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual” (1993, p. 211). He argues that it is this compulsory aspect and the belief in its inherent superiority that is problematic. It is within this context that “a systematic set of institutional and cultural arrangements exists that rewards and privileges people for being or appearing to be heterosexual, and establishing potential punishments or lack of privilege for being or appearing to be homosexual” (p. 211).

Homophobia has been defined as “the fear and hatred of homosexuality in oneself and in others and emerges as a result of heterosexism (p. 211). Audre Lorde describes homophobia as “a terror surrounding feelings of love for members of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feelings in others” (1988, p. 20). These feelings of hatred and terror create discomfort which reinforce the belief that everyone should be heterosexual.

Pharr, a White lesbian feminist, speaks very poignantly about the oppressive power of heterosexism and the effects of homophobia on her life and the lives of others:

In my life I have experienced the effects of homophobia through rejection by friends, threats of loss of employment, and threats upon my life; and I have witnessed far worse things happening to other lesbian and gay people: loss of children, beatings, rape, death. Its power is great enough to keep ten to twenty percent of the population living lives of fear (if their sexual identity is hidden) or lives of danger (if their sexual identity is visible) or both. And its power is great enough to keep the remaining eighty to ninety percent of the population trapped in their own fears (1997, p. 2).

Denormalizing Whiteness to examine the oppressiveness of heterosexism is a necessary part of any pedagogy of Whiteness. However, heterosexism and homophobia are not exclusive to Whiteness as they are also deeply entrenched in all cultural and racial groups. Audre Lorde (1988), for example, addresses Black feminists in “I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities” to show that the forces of heterosexism and homophobia,
rooted in fear of difference, work like racism to separate and divide Black feminists and oppress Black lesbians. Lourde's message to her Black sisters is to awaken to the reality of how they, who are oppressed as Black women by their race and gender must, in turn, become conscious of being oppressors of their Black lesbian sisters through their inherent belief in the superiority of heterosexism. Lourde challenges Black feminists to deal with this problem by engaging in critical self reflection and rooting out homophobic thoughts and behaviors. While the oppressiveness of heterosexism and homophobia in any community of people needs to be challenged, at the same time it is important to make a distinction between these communities and whiteness. Because Whiteness is institutionalized, it has the power to exploit and oppress gay people in the area of housing, employment, etc. (hooks, 1989).

This discussion leads to another key component of pedagogies of Whiteness: as Whites we need the vision and commitment to work across all oppressions. If Whiteness operates to divide groups of people, then challenging Whiteness must involve forming coalitions that support and build on particular interests and struggles that work “with and through difference” (Hall, 1996, p. 444). hooks states, “It is our collective responsibility as people of color and as white people who are committed to ending white supremacy to help one another. It is our collective responsibility to educate for critical consciousness” (1989, p. 118). Collaboration, therefore, must be part of the vision of rearticulating Whiteness if structures are to transform.

This chapter ends with a few key ideas presented by Yudice (1995) in his essay, “Neither Impugning nor Disavowing Whiteness Does a Viable Politics Make: The Limits of Identity Politics.” Yudice states that Whites need to feel they have a stake in this struggle and argues that we need to move beyond identity politics and “move on to an agenda that will be more effective in transforming structures” (1995, p. 268). He stresses that coalition building must focus on what benefits the citizenry as opposed to the capitalist corporations and that the struggle for social justice needs to center on resource distribution. He states, “Shifting the
focus of struggle from identity to resource distribution will also make it possible to engage such seemingly nonracial issues as the environment, the military-industrial complex, foreign aid, and free-trade agreements as matters impacting local identities and thus requiring a global politics that works outside of the national frame” (1995, p. 280). In calling for a rearticulation of Whiteness he does not want to lose sight of the global forces “that greatly exceed although they certainly do not exclude the question of whiteness” (1995, p. 269).
Chapter 5

Deconstructing Whiteness:
Pedagogical Implications for Rethinking Schooling

A small but growing number of White educators are committed to teaching from an anti-racism perspective and are working to challenge White domination, power, and the perpetuation of hegemonic knowledge and practices. The efforts of these White anti-racist educators offer hope and encouragement for furthering educational transformation and as their processes of personal transformation are shared through narratives and dialogues, the discourse elucidating the liberatory possibilities of Whiteness expands. The participation of White educators in anti-racism education is sustaining, yet these efforts are but “a drop in the bucket” when the pervasiveness of White supremacy/racism in educational institutions across Ontario and indeed, Canada is considered. Conscious or unconscious of the oppressiveness of Whiteness, most White educators continue to teach a Eurocentric, White curriculum and privilege scientific knowledge, both of which are held as superior ways of knowing and are deeply entrenched and supported in the structures of educational and societal institutions.

In this chapter, I explore the questions: What does an interrogation of Whiteness really entail for the political project of rethinking schooling? How do we, as White educators work with issues of race and racism in educational institutions? How do we engage in anti-racist work in the classroom, and move away from simply adding on a bit of Black History, for example? Multicultural education is an approach that is warmly embraced by White educators, however, given that multicultural education functions to maintain the status quo and is an ideology which supports White supremacy/racism because it erases power differentials; it is highly problematic and needs to be disrupted. Anti-racism education, on the other hand, offers a critical reading of the power of Whiteness and of its connection to histories of colonialism and imperialism. It offers a space for White educators to critically examine the ways in which
the White self is constructed and invested in power and privilege and to deconstruct the colonial ideologies that continue to be perpetuated through multicultural education today.

In order for White educators to engage in the transformational possibilities of education, critical shifts must occur at the level of "taken for granted" ideological knowledge. These shifts require that White educators deconstruct and critically reflect on their commonsense assumptions about our school system as being neutral, and fair and equitable for all students. Whiteness is at the center of the epistemological tendencies that shape and mold our educational institutions. The tentacles of Whiteness rest heavy and spread deep and wide on educational terrain. Studying Whiteness, within a critical integrative anti-racism framework and not a multicultural educational approach, allows space for White educators to critically engage with issues of culture, race cognition, and White supremacy/racism. This deconstruction process begins with ourselves, with the ways we are diversely positioned and invested in racialized systems, and seeks to root out oppression in our own lives, in order to facilitate the transformation of educational and societal structures.

Multiculturalism in the Canadian context is highly problematic and so, I begin this chapter by deconstructing multiculturalism as an ideology behind which White power and privilege hide. Secondly, one of the tenets underlying the pervasive and disturbing neutrality of Whiteness is the prevalent notion that our educational system is apolitical and objective. This premise needs to be debunked to enable "movement" from a Eurocentric world view to an anti-racism perspective. The pervasive perception that the official canon of knowledge is the only valid way of knowing to seeing that there are multiple realities, experiences, knowledges and histories that are not neutral, rather are socially and politically constructed involves debunking White positionality. Thirdly, the reintroduction of standardized testing in Ontario schools represents a move to further entrench education in positivism and privileges the scientific paradigm. Standardized testing needs to be vigorously, and vocally challenged by anti-racist educators because under the guise of objectivity, further inequality and racism
flourish. Next, I briefly touch on the changing concept of race. I register its importance as a field of study for White people, yet acknowledge that I am unable to delve into the issues and debates in any depth within the scope of this thesis. I end this chapter with a few concluding thoughts about White peoples' participation in anti-racism education.

**The Ideology of Multiculturalism**

There is a tremendous denial on the part of White Canadians that racism exists, so that it is not uncommon to hear Whites at all levels of the social strata adamantly insist that racism is a thing of the past, while at the same time seeming to be unconscious of their own racist constructs. I agree whole heartedly with Razack when she states that the denial of racism is an integral part of White Canadian identity (1998, p. 11). Prime Minister Trudeau's 1971 proclamation of an official, national policy of multiculturalism, viewed as politically expedient at the time by his opponents, fosters the notion of Canada as a country based on tolerance of cultural diversity - we are a mosaic, while the United States are a melting pot. The national image we have of ourselves as Canadians who are multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural, co-existing harmoniously is deeply imprinted on the Canadian national psyche and promoted by social and political institutionalis. It is not surprising, then, that Canadians believe the national myth that Canada is a multicultural country which accepts people of all races, cultures, and creeds as equals.

Ng argues that multiculturalism is an “ideological frame” that reconceptualizes Canadian society from a country developed solely by the French and the English to a country built by immigrants of all races and ethnic groups and was a politically expedient move on the part of politicians to appease the diverse minority population who had become an integral part of the Canadian social, political, and economic reality and were vocally pressing for equitable treatment (1995, p. 36). Multiculturalism, developed within a framework of national unity, became normalized as common sense and taken for granted knowledge. Thus, it is not debated, or questioned, and on an unconscious level it is understood as the way that we define
and perceive Canadian reality. The national policy of multiculturalism is premised on fair and equitable treatment of all people, and sets out to explain the government’s responsibilities, policies and programs to assist diverse ethnic groups. The multicultural policy, then, becomes “a way of managing race and ethnic relations within a state apparatus” (Li, 1990, p. 14). The pronouncement by Prime Minister Trudeau that there is no official culture, and no group which takes precedence over any other, functions to obliterate power differentials; that is, White/dominance is eclipsed by this social construction. Seen in this light, multiculturalism is a political project created by White men and acts as a veneer to camouflage inequality and unfair policies and practices. Like the colour blind theory, and the ideology of individualism, multiculturalism is part of the White/dominant discourse, which props up White supremacy/racism. Multiculturalism can be seen as “...a trope to satiate non-White peoples while relieving White anxiety and guilt about their colonial and imperial past” (Bedard, 2000, 48).

Multicultural education functions as an assimilationist tool of the dominant group. Whiteness remains at the center and difference is relegated to the margins. Histories, and knowledges of oppressed groups continue to be silenced. Razack states that, “...education for social change is not so much about new information as it is about disrupting the hegemonic ways of seeing through which subjects make themselves dominant” (p. 10). In the construction of the dominant group’s identity as tolerant, peaceful, and accepting of differences, Whites fail to see the power of Whiteness to silence histories and present day realities of oppression. Canada’s history of racist immigration policies, segregation and discrimination against groups such as Chinese, Jews, and the indigenous peoples, participation in slavery, and exploitation of immigrants are stories which remain largely untold in Canadian classrooms.

When education is not rooted in the politics of anti-racism, and fails to focus on White dominance and power, White educators participate in presenting a sanitize version of history: we were a haven for Black slaves escaping from the United States, a country built by
immigrants who had equal opportunity to contribute and achieve in Canada. Indigenous peoples are represented in very linear and fixed ways - their traditional ways of life are presented largely through a Western worldview. The silencing of the history of colonialism serves to erase the histories, stories, languages, cultures, and ways of knowing of Canada’s indigenous peoples. Hall states:

This project of silencing Canada’s first peoples has reinforced the appropriation of land, the degradation of the environment, the creation of assimilationist residential schools, and the continuation of racist stereotypes about people of aboriginal descent. And through curriculum design, program planning, school reform, textbook adaptation, language policies, limitations of language provisions, and thousands of smaller ways, many nonaboriginal educators have participated knowingly or unknowingly in this educational silencing. The accumulated result of this systemic exclusion has been that information about aboriginal life has not been easily accessible to students, teachers, and adult educators. In particular, the perspectives of aboriginal peoples, expressed in their own voices without the mediation of Western culture, have been largely absent (2000, p. 203).

Multicultural education focuses on educating White people through the sharing of cultural information, and an emphasis on cultural sensitivity. An underlying assumption of this approach is based on the belief that information will correct the misunderstandings about the minoritized and that an increased understanding of ethnic differences will lead to counteracting biased and prejudiced attitudes of individuals. Another erroneous underlying assumption at work here, as well, is that all groups of people are working from a level playing field. In other words, there is a complete negation of the power imbalance that exists between the dominant and the subordinate groups.

In attempting to teach White people about the culture of “Others”, culture is usually presented as a static body of knowledge which can be transmitted easily. The aspects of culture that are studied are usually the more consumable ones, of dress, food, and customs. This oversimplistic representation distorts culture - it is reified, fragmented, and homogenized. When culture is represented in this simplistic way, as monolithic entities, and taken out of historical context, the existing diversity, and complexities which exist within cultures are
absent. Reference to the interrelational dynamics of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity are suppressed. The portrayal of culture, in this way, reinforces White peoples’ stereotypes about the racialized “Other”, rather than challenging our inherent assumption of superiority. It is this assumption of White superiority that needs to be disrupted, as well as the Western binary way of thinking which categorizes self, “Other” into good/evil, light/dark, superior/inferior. It is this positioning of the racialized “Other” as inferior that needs to be destabilized through an interrogation of the ways that Whiteness gains power and control through the subjugation of the racialized “Other”.

Multiculturalists view racism as mainly the result of individual prejudice and negative attitudes, therefore, changing individual attitudes assumes the prime focus of this approach. Because the link to White power and privilege and to systems of domination and subordination is not made, the importance of systemic racism and of structural and societal change is often overlooked by multiculturalists. Without a critical examination of the power of Whiteness, this approach remains very ineffective. It also masks racial inequalities and practices and furthers the illusion that Canada is for the most part a racist free country.

When White teachers bring issues of race and racism into the classroom, using the multicultural framework, they continue to act from their White Eurocentric worldviews, and to rely on a colonial lens. Because of this, dealing with issues of race and racism effectively in the school setting can be quite problematic. The depth to which White educators are unprepared to effectively handle issues of race and racism can not be overstated as they find themselves wading into unfamiliar and dangerous waters. The results can be upsetting for teachers and painfully experienced by minority students.

I would like to draw on one such example involving the award winning film, “just a little red dot”, written, directed, and produced by a Scarborough Board of Education teacher, Mitra Sen. The film, released in 1996, is aimed at elementary students and rapidly gained popularity among teachers. It was promoted as a film within the multiculturalism framework, a film about cultural diversity. In the words of the film maker, “educating through a positive
approach of sharing cultures will lead to a better understanding and respect for all people” (Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario Newsletter, 1997, p. 4). This “feel good” approach is in itself, problematic in that it obscures the real issues of exclusion, discrimination, and racist attitudes under a veneer of celebrating cultural diversity and does not provide a critical framework for teachers to analyse issues of race and racism.

The Metro Toronto Board of Education is a case in point. It withdrew this film from classroom use, not long after it was introduced because of an outcry from parents over the mishandling of the film by teachers. Although the film seemed to be “light” on the surface, a film about diversity, it, in fact, contained complex issues to do with race, exclusion, and racism that White teachers were not properly prepared to discuss. The Toronto Board’s response to angry parents’ protests was to require educators to attend an in-service before showing the film (personal communication, May, 1997). This solution, although understandable, may be likened to putting a bandage over a very large festering sore. One-shot in-services are neither an effective nor adequate response to preparing White educators to discuss and analyze racial issues in a multi-racial setting. The point, I am making is that the multicultural approach to issues of race and racism is very ineffective and highly problematic for both classroom teachers and students alike. White educators need a grounding in an interrogation of Whiteness within a critical, integrative anti-racism framework.

**Disrupting Eurocentric Hegemony in the Classroom**

Recently, a friend related a disappointing incident to me. She had approached the principal of her children’s school asking to have some information put in the school newsletter. The information concerned a campaign by Toronto based groups, Miquila Solidarity Network and Labour Behind the Label, to inform people of the conditions under which garments are manufactured in Canada and abroad. Child labour and sweat shops that exploit people and make them work in horrible conditions are supported by such large
corporations such as Nike and the Northern divisions of stores. The principal declined including this information in the school newsletter, saying that the issue was too political.

This example reflects, I believe, a commonsense assumption among educators that education is a neutral, objective and apolitical activity, yet nothing could be further from the truth. This conservative position is part of the official educational rhetoric and is rooted in White Eurocentric hegemony, and supports the status quo. Barlow and Robertson state, “Curriculum that implies (or promises) that science is objective, that nature is for harvesting or that welfare is for people who can’t look after themselves is sending messages that are deeply political” (1994, p. 125).

The ways in which the educational system in Ontario is driven by the goals of a market economy are staggering and on the increase. Both business and industries enter into the school arena and influence school policy and curricular materials and directions in significant ways. To give a personal example, my daughter who is in Grade 9 came home one day recently to tell me that she needed to write a resume for herself. She was concerned because she, of course, has not worked and wondered what she would put in her resume. We both were a little dumbfounded by the expectation that 14 year-olds should be preparing work-related resumes. Yet students as young as 13 are now expected to set goals in terms of career planning. This is only one example, among many, of the ways that business is entering into education. Michael Apple asserts that “as a system of institutions, schools also ultimately help produce the type of knowledge (as a kind of commodity) that is needed to maintain the dominant economic, political, and cultural arrangements that now exist” (1990, p. x). To a larger and larger extent the business community is influencing what is worth knowing in school contexts. Particular business points of view are validated in schools and legitimated and sanctioned as official knowledge.

Educators in many global contexts are working in extremely conservative times. In Ontario the attack on teachers and education by the Ontario government has been relentless.
The Conservative government has set a “data driven” agenda for schools to improve reading and math scores and has equated improved scores with good education. There is huge pressure on teachers to conform to this new agenda as we are told by our administrators that we had better get used to being “data driven.” Further, the idea that educators are merely “instruments of the state”, and that our job is to implement state policies and practices, and adapt a “data-driven” mentality needs to be debunked. Paulo Freire asserts that all education is a political act and that there is no neutrality, and no middle ground; educators either work for social justice or maintain the status quo. He states:

Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom”, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (1997, p. 53).

Unravelling Eurocentric hegemony is about “the practice of freedom” (p. 53) and challenging the conformity and monocultural approach to education. It is important that as educators, we stay connected to our passionate beliefs, and be guided by a perspective that is ethical and democratic. Using an integrative anti-racism perspective, classrooms are viewed as spaces in which to work for equity and social justice and issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality are crucial analytical tools for engaging students in critical discussions about their lives, their histories and their world. When we work critically and passionately with students, then we let go of the false notion of objectivity. We see the world as constituted out of relations of power and privilege, and interrogate the crucial role played by Whiteness as privilege. We cannot view ourselves as the disseminators of a neutral body of knowledge and information, working on behalf of the state, rather we take a stand and work against the grain, as there is no middle ground in anti-racist work (1996).
Our goal is to allow all students to reach their potential, to stay engaged in the educational process and to develop as critical thinkers, having a sense of pride and esteem in who they are, whether they be African-American, lesbian, poor or working class, able-bodied or disabled. We must recognize that we live our lives involved in domination and subordination in very hidden ways. White educators need to challenge the colour-blind approach to education, acknowledge the saliency of race for issues of identity formation, and critically understand the ways that race remains a central organizing principle and feature of social reality. This involves an interrogation of the enormous ways in which our society is racialized.

In the classroom issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality are central to the production of knowledge. When we focus on giving students a voice and recognize their multi-positioned subject locations, we are cognizant of the powerful link between knowledge production and identity. Curriculum cannot be decontextualized but must be located and relate to subjects and to what students are interested in and care about (Dei: 1999). Students enter into the classroom discussion through their experienced locations. They bring their own knowledges, experiences and understandings to the classroom and in this way the classroom is a space where there are multiple readings of the world. Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum in meaningful ways, through their art, music, history and literature.

Students who do not feel that school is about them are in danger of dropping out (Dei et al., 1997). Kevin Anderson, a young, African-Canadian university student related the following about his experience going through the Hamilton school system:

When I was in elementary school, I didn't know a lot of famous Black people, except the ones that everybody knew like Dr. Martin Luther King. For a lot of Black students, including my sister, this is where they start to loose their focus in school, when they start to realize that school isn't about them. I found that I did my best learning when I was on my own researching what I thought was really important. Things that I had thought I had missed. I found that really fascinating. But if I had learned that in school I would have found that fascinating as well. I think that was the part that hurt me the most was because now only I
knew about it. It was up to me to teach my friends. It was never up to my friends to teach me about their history, they always learned that in school (personal communication, May 5, 1997).

Eurocentric hegemony privileges and legitimates objective knowledge over emotionality and intuitive and spiritual knowledge. When we privilege spirituality, emotionality, and intuitiveness as valid ways of knowing in the classroom, then we are engaging in counter-hegemonic acts and challenging the dominance of Western scientific knowledge as the only valid way of knowing. Challenging the limitations of knowledge based on the scientific model, with the exploration of physical reality involving our five senses only, places an emphasis on the broader cosmological understanding and "way of reading the world". This is a holistic approach to education that recognizes the mind, body and spirit of students and of the importance of nurturing each of these aspects of self. In addition, the question of what students care about is privileged. Issues of peace, war, racism, homophobia, the environment are taken up in ways that engage students to be actively informed and care about making a difference in their own lives and in their world.

Monture-Angus maintains that we need to get knowledge into our hearts so that we will live what we learn (1995: 38). We open spaces in the classroom for this to happen when we critically engage students in making meaning by "reading the world" in which they live. Educators need to "speak to the heart" of students, and stir them to feel passionately connected to classroom learning and the larger world. It is not enough to get knowledge into our heads; we also must get knowledge into our hearts and into the hearts of our students, so that we/they will live what we/they learn (Monture-Angus, 1995). In this way students expand and know themselves and each other in new and more humanitarian ways.

Classrooms are open spaces to teach about global inequalities and to critically analyze and question our relationship to the social and economic exploitation of what dominant groups call the Third World. How we benefit economically as part of the Western world rests on the cheap and or unpaid labour of people in Third World countries. We live the benefits. As
educators, we help students draw the connections between what is happening here in Canada and what is happening in countries in other parts of the world. This is usually not part of the corpus of "legitimate" school knowledge. Michael Apple (1998) reveals how he was made aware of an unjust situation when visiting an Asian country. A large corporation has shifted a good deal of its potato production from the United States to an Asian country (unnamed to protect activists working in this country) where farm workers are ununionized and the cost of producing potatoes is lower.

Indigenous people who had farmed land for hundreds of years were paid minimal money and moved to the slums surrounding large cities to look for meager work in order to scratch out an existence. It is important in classrooms to take up such issues with students, and arouse them emotionally about injustices that happen locally as well as globally. Stories from the perspective of the local indigenous people who are living the reality of these injustices are heard. Going beyond the classroom walls and reaching out to the community, to invite social justice groups into the classroom, groups such as Maquila Solidarity Network and the Labour Behind the Label mentioned previously, grounds student learning in the actual and the real, connects them to the resistance movement and sows seeds of activism.

Our choice seems to be clear: we can work to transform education (anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-classism and anti-sexism) or act from our Whiteness in largely unconscious, yet none the less, oppressive ways. Paulo Freire's concept of "praxis" - action and reflection on action - is crucial to our transformation. Through praxis, contradictions surface that propel us to rethink and resee situations. Our critical consciousness deepens and guides our transformative educational practice. As we critically reflect on the ideas, values, and perspectives that drive the status quo and upon which the logic of the present education system is structured, we become aware of how these differ from the values and ideals that drive our own ethical beliefs and perspective. As we interrogate White supremacy and colonial history and ideology, we begin to fully grasp the extent of the oppressiveness of these social,
political, historical, and economic forces for those who fall outside of the parameters of normativity. Monture-Angus, expresses the function of education for Aboriginal peoples:

Education is one of the mainstays of creating and spreading historical (mis)-understandings. Relationships such as these should not be allowed to slip our attention when considering educational reforms. The point is clear, Aboriginal Peoples now understand education for what it has been—a tool of our oppression. Education is merely a reflection of Canadian society—its version of history and its values. If our society is racist, and this is a fact that Canadians are now coming to understand, then our education systems can only reflect and further entrench that racism (1995, p. 95).

As White educators, engaging in anti-racism education entails interrogating the powerful position of normativity of Whiteness and of the ways the official canon of knowledge is hegemonic and is driven by a project of systemic exclusion and silencing. Examining the power relations that shape knowledge production involves linking Whiteness to history and engaging in “active memory work” to explore the myths perpetuated by White supremacy and its distorted view of history. It also involves understanding White positionality and calls for an examination of the ways that our White identity has been constructed through histories of colonialism and imperialism and invested in systems of power and privilege. An interrogation of the ways knowledge about ourselves and “Others” has been constructed, through a deconstruction of our racist socialization and the ways the construction of the White self is connected to histories of racism must be a starting point for all White educators entering into anti-racism work. In this way we engage in a process of self-reflectively thinking through our own complicity with White power structures. This continues to be our blind spot and where the greatest amount of resistance lies. To speak of complicity means to admit that we are part of the problem, that racism is a White issue. Yet, this must be the focus of our interrogation.
Centering Standardized Testing in White Supremacy

Whiteness is grounded in rationality and in a close association with science (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Kincheloe and Steinberg state, “As a scientific construct, whiteness privileges mind over body; intellect over experiential ways of knowing; and mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations, and tactile understanding” (p. 5). Science is considered the apex of objective knowledge and in Ontario schools a positivist conception of knowledge is privileged. A positivist conception of knowledge is “where there is a straight line between the knower and the known...and there is only one objective truth” (Razack, 1998, p. 37). Positivism plays itself out in the form of standardized testing, presently in Grades 3 and 6. In addition all Grade 10 students face taking a literacy test. The thrust for the reemergance of standardized testing has come from the business community in Canada. Barlow and Robertson state, “National testing and ‘standards’ had been called for, directly or indirectly, by the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI), the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce” (1994, p. 117). This push was supported by the federal government and bought into by the provincial governments.

Standardized testing is presented as neutral and objective and is equated with “good” education, yet it is none of these things. Standardized testing has been critiqued as having a White middle-class bias. It is highly politically motivated and one more assault on schools, teachers and students by the Ontario government. In addition, standardized testing encourages the public to view testing as a simplistic solution to the complex problems of schooling. Testing, however, does more harm than good. The results of these tests are often posted, school by school, in local newspapers. Inner city schools and rural, poorer schools do less well than affluent suburban schools. What is then set in motion is a rash of scapegoating fostered by fear and anxiety and a conservative discourse about “accountability.” Families, their culture, and their social class are seen as failing kids. I agree with David Hillen when he states, “Standardized testing, from this angle can be seen as a form of bullying: Schools and
neighbourhoods already suffering from low self-esteem are in effect kicked while they are down” (2001, p. 13). Standardized testing has a highly divisive agenda: trustees put pressure on principals to produce better test scores, principals relay this message to teachers, both principals and teachers blame parents for not doing their part, and of course students are competing against one another in the same classroom, in different schools, and across nations.

Although standardized testing is a relatively recently phenomena in Canada, standardized testing in United States classrooms has a longer history and is connected to “scientific” racism. Harold Berlak (2001) states in “Race and the Achievement Gap” that there is a long history to the testing craze and its link to racist discourse which is used to explain why white, Anglo-Americans perform better than other racial groups. Beginning in the 1930s with the eugenics movement, which holds that there is a biological basis for the superiority of Whites, Berlak argues that the leaders of the racist movement were connected to the field of scientific measurement. The racist theories they propagated received wide publicity and of course continue to do so. He states, “In 1994, once again using standardized test data, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein wrote The Bell Curve and claimed to have proven that the inferior place of Black and brown people in the social, political, and economic order was rooted in biology” (2001, p. 10). Although these arguments for the biological superiority of Whites were discredited by biologists and geneticists, a more subtle form of “scientific” racism has cropped up recently that places the inferiority of racial groups in culture and history rather than genetics.

Berlak examines a number of recent studies that offer explanations for the race gap in test scores. One study was conducted by Stanford University professor Claude Steele, an African-American psychologist. In his study he gave an equal number of African-American and White Stanford University students a short standardized test in literature. All students were successful, and high achieving. Half of the students were told that the test measured ability and half were told that the test did not assess ability but was attempting to understand “the psychological factors involved in solving verbal problems” (2001, p. 10). The results of
the study showed that the African-American students who were told that the test was a true measure of ability scored significantly lower than the White students. The other African-American scores were equal to the White students'. White students performed the same in both groups. The explanation offered by Steele is that the Black students knew that they were likely to be seen as having limited ability. Steele labels this phenomenon as "stereotype vulnerability." He states, "it is serious intimidation, implying as it does that if they should perform badly, they may not belong in walks of life where their tested abilities are important-walks of life in which they are heavily invested."

Although it isn’t possible to examine further the results of the other studies cited in Berlak’s article in the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that the results of other studies support Steele’s research and show that the underachieving of African-American students, as well as, other students of colour is related to their stigmatized racial identity and to an uncertainty that they will reap the rewards of hard work and school success. Berlak concluded by stating that standard operating principles such as standardized testing appear normalized and thus make racist practices seem invisible. He states, “Standardized tests are a particularly invidious form of institutionalized racism because they lend the cloak of science to policies that have denied, and are continuing to deny, persons of color equal access to educational and job opportunities" (2001, p. 11).

**The Concept of Race**

A conversation with a Grade 8 White teacher not long ago brings into question just how much some White educators’ thinking remains embedded in colonial conceptions of race. This teacher reported very confidently to me that there were only three races: the Negroid, the Caucasian and the Asian. She set about describing the different ways each race looked and then said that most of her students were Caucasian which she felt included Middle Eastern, Indian and European peoples. She went on to say that one of her students, an
African-American was quite upset when she told her she belonged to the Negroid race. In order to have her students grasp her race classification, she had them move to three different areas of the classroom according to their race. In addition, she insisted that this information was presented at a geography in-service for teachers by an anthropologist! (Personal Communication, March 24, 1999).

The classification of groups of people based on biology and genetics, according to physical and cultural characteristics has its roots in colonial discourse where observable, superficial physical traits, such as skin colour were used to identify racial groups. The meaning of race was fixed and treated as an essence, a concrete form. However, it has long been understood that genetics does not determine one's race and that there is no basis for the plausability of biological races. “The data compiled by various scientists demonstrate, contrary to popular opinion, that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences. That is, greater genetic variation exists within the populations typically labeled Black and White than between these populations” (Lopez, 1998, p.194). The linking of physical traits with character traits was part of the dominant racist discourse which argued for the biological inferiority of people of colour. The assertion of White biological superiority was tied to White supremacist discourse that justified the economic exploitation of people of colour and rationalized systemic inequalities.

Although today the theoretical concept of race has been totally transformed, there remains a lot of confusion as to exactly what race is all about. Lopez states, “Despite the pervasive influence of race in our lives and in U.S. law, a review of opinions and articles by judges and legal academics reveals a startling fact: few seem to know what race is and is not” (1998, 193). This observation, I believe, can be extended beyond only judges and legal academics, to include all of us. Undoubtedly, many people no longer adhere to the biologistic concept of race, although Frankenberg (1993) still found elements of this discourse in the stories of many of the women she interviewed. Yet the understanding that there is no scientific basis to
the concept of race is gaining prevalence. Still confusion exists as some White people have
made the assumption that this then mean that we can no longer talk about racism. Of course,
this is not the case. We live in a society that is heavily racialized. Race continues to have
tremendous power and consequences for our lives, and in short “race mediates every aspect of
our lives” (Lopez, 1998, 192). Skin colour, as well, as language, culture, and religion,
therefore, are of utmost importance in terms of real material consequences. To be White,
Christian, and native-speaking constitutes real material consequences, in terms of privilege in
the Canadian context. To be non-White, non-native speaking, and of a religion other than
Christian constitutes markers for racialization and exclusion.

Race is not based on biology, rather it is viewed as a social and a political construction. It
is the social practices, and human interactions and not biological racial categories that forms
the basis for racial categorization. Race is a relational concept produced and maintained by
differential power between the dominant/White group and the subordinate group so that the
focus is on the institutional framework within which groups are defined. The term “racialized”
is used to denote how certain groups have been singled out for unequal treatment. There have
been many examples in Canadian history where groups of people were racialized in legal terms
by the state. The Indian Act of 1876 stipulated legally how Indians were to be treated in
Canada. Li states:

The statute defined virtually every aspect of life affecting Indians, and institutionalized
many restrictions on them. Despite many revisions, the original Indian Act has basically
been maintained to the present day. Because of its pervasive and destructive impact
on the Indians, Frideres (1983: 33) has described it as ‘the most vicious mechanism
of social control that exists in Canada today’. Thus the state policy towards the
Indians, more than anything else, stands out as the most salient factor in explaining
the relationship between Native and white Canadians (1990, p. 13).

Omi and Winant (1993) suggest drawing on the racial formation approach to the
understanding of race. They stress the importance of recognizing the historical context and
social construction of racially defined experiences (p. 6). They suggest that the development of a critical, process-oriented theory of race must meet the following three requirements:

- It must apply to contemporary political relationships.
- It must apply in an increasingly global context.
- It must apply across historical time.

Race is used politically depending on the social and historical contexts. For example, Somali refugees were linked to welfare cheats by the Toronto media in the late 1980s (Dei, 2000). The language used by the Western media to depict the Iraqi people as violent and ruthless made the killing of 100,000 people seem inconsequential during the 1990 Persian Gulf War. The media used doublespeak which is the intentional use of jargon and vague terms to distort the real consequences of the war on the lives of the Iraqi people. So for example, collateral damage was used to refer to civilian deaths. The use of racial imagery, therefore, is very much a political tool which creates a convenient “us versus-them attitude”.

Engaging In Anti-Racism Education in Schools

As White educators our challenge is to build critical consciousness through unmasking our complicity in White supremacy. We need to interrogate how relations of domination and subordination continue to play themselves out in the classroom and continue to influence the way that we construct knowledge about self and “Others”. This involves, for example, asking ourselves if we can recognize racist constructs and ideology when we hear them in conversation, when we see them in films, and when we read them in newspapers. If we can’t recognize them in our everyday lives, we won’t be able to recognize them when they emerge in the classroom, in the conversations of our students, in the films we view, and in the textbooks we use. We must also be self-reflexive and vigilant in interrogating our own
thoughts, feelings and acts to probe how they may still be entrenched in notions of White supremacy.

Even among those of us who actively work for social justice, there is a need for critical interrogation and self-reflection, especially in the area of White privilege and the interrelated systems of privilege. I have argued that interrogating hegemonic ways of constructing knowledge must involve seeing our own complicity in the oppression of “Others”. Knowing when to speak and when to listen as a White person, how to open up spaces for silenced voices and histories, and how to create spaces that are safe for the minoritized may seem easy to put into practice, however, these issues can be complicated when there is a lack of critical engagement on the part of the dominant order.

My experience in organizing a Hamilton-Wentworth Board of Education anti-racism symposium for high school students illustrates this point. The question was raised in our committee by myself and a community member as to how to reach the students of colour and make sure they attended the symposium in large numbers. Not all members of our group, however, saw this as important, feeling that the symposium should be for anyone interested regardless of being from the dominant group or the subordinate group. The result was that the White students did, in fact, outnumber the students of colour at the symposium and the students of colour were noticeably reluctant to speak. In having the dominant order reproduced once again the students of colour did not feel safe in discussing issues about White supremacy/racism that would place them in a vulnerable position.

Radzack comments that “few people of colour have ever considered learning in a mixed-race environment safe” (1998, p. 48). Monture-Angus relates the pain and the anger she feels when attending conferences and hearing White people speak; unconscious of their racism, they inflict pain none the less. She explains her reaction to hearing her people referred to as “disadvantaged” and relates that this is a White, middle-class yardstick, measured in materialism. The values of the Aboriginal community are not measured in materialism, she states, rather, people are valued for who they are. She tells us, “Disadvantage is a nice, soft,
comfortable word to describe dispossession, to describe a situation of force whereby our very existence, our histories, are erased continuously right before our eyes. Words like disadvantage conceal racism (1995, p. 14). To end this discussion, I believe there needs to be opportunities for students of colour to meet together with facilitators and teachers who are non-White to discuss issues in a safe environment. White students can also learn about Whiteness in all White groups. From personal experience, I can relate that when Whites are in learning situations where they are in the minority, where they listen, Whites have much to learn from the perspectives, and stories of the minoritized. I do know that personally, I have learned from the writings of scholars of colour and from my interactions with people of colour. I am also aware of the debates that talk about the parasitic behaviour of Whites who learn from the pain of people of colour. As Whites we need to be cognizant of this.

In conclusion working for equity and social justice interrogates and challenges the existing hegemonic power relations and knowledge base of Whiteness. The nature of this work is oppositional and counter-hegemonic. It requires White educators to form positive anti-racist identities, to be political and proactive, and to focus on what can be done in the spaces in which we have power to transform schooling. Classrooms can be forums where students can talk about racial, class, and gender inequalities such as hate, oppression, class, poverty, sexism, homophobia, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, and racist ideas. They can also be spaces for bringing in silenced knowledges and histories, indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and promote cooperative learning skills among students.

bell hooks states that in her adult life she has seen "very few white folks who are really willing to go the distance to create a world of racial equality-white folks willing to take risks, to be courageous, to live against the grain" (1994, p. 26). This is our challenge, to have the courage to stand up for our beliefs in racial justice, to engage in a revolutionary pedagogy and to ensure that our daily lives reflect our politics. Our challenge is to strive for ethical clarity in our classroom practice (Freire, 1997, p. 314). Freire maintains that posing ethical questions is at the heart of the debates about education. As White educators we must position ourselves as
learners and listen to silenced voices and to the perspectives and histories of those defined by difference. Freire states, "If we don't learn to listen to these voices, in truth we don't really learn how to speak. Only those who listen, speak. Those who do not listen, end up merely yelling, barking out the language while imposing their ideas (1997, p. 306). Clearly, our challenge is to live our Whiteness in progressive, liberatory ways.
References


