THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD:
A CRITICAL RACE AFRICOOLOGY OF COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN
BLACKS AND WHITES IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

by

Philip Sean Steven Howard

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Philip Sean Steven Howard 2009
Abstract

In recent years, there has been a significant amount of new attention to white dominance and privilege (or whiteness) as the often unmarked inverse of racial oppression. This interest has spawned the academic domain called Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). While the critical investigation of whiteness is not new, and has been pioneered by Black scholars beginning at least since the early 1900s in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, what is notable about this new interest in whiteness is its advancement almost exclusively by white scholars. The paucity of literature centering the Black voice in the study of whiteness both suggests the lack of appreciation for the importance of this perspective when researching the phenomenon of racial dominance, and raises questions about the manner in which racial equity work is approached by some Whites who do work that is intended to advance racial equity.

This study investigates the context of racial equity collaborations between Blacks and Whites, responding to this knowledge deficit in two ways:

a) it centers the Black voice, specifically and intentionally seeking the perspectives of Blacks about racial equity collaborations

b) it investigates the nature and effects of the relationships between Blacks and Whites in these collaborative endeavours.
This qualitative research study uses in-depth interview data collected from ten Black racial equity workers who collaborate with Whites in doing racial equity work. The data makes evident that the Black participants find these collaborations to be necessary and strategic while at the same time having the potential to undermine their own agency. The study examines this contradiction, discussing several manifestations of it in the lives of these Black racial equity workers. It outlines the importance of Black embodied knowledge to racial equity work and to these collaborations, and outlines an epistemology of unknowing and a politics of humility that these Blacks seek in their white colleagues. The study also outlines the collective and individual strategies used by these Black racial equity workers to navigate and resist the contradictory terrain of their collaborations with Whites in racial equity work.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation marks the end of a long, transformative journey and process of becoming that has been a weaving together of many circumstances, situations, and individuals. As I reflect upon this journey, it is difficult to separate the knowledge that I have gained from the relationships that I have either formed or deepened along the way. I greatly cherish those relationships, and it is those relationships that I seek to acknowledge in this admittedly inadequate fashion here.

First and foremost is my Lord Jesus Christ. It is He that brought me to this journey, and sustained me through it. So many of the insights in this thesis were birthed in prayer as I asked Him to make sense of scholarship and research data that seemed, at times, overwhelming.

I am thankful for the scholarship, leadership, intellectual mentorship, and friendship of Professor George Dei, my supervisor. His stellar example of not just “talking the talk” but also “walking the walk” demonstrate the true meaning of antiracist/anticolonial praxis. He continues to go beyond the call of duty to create, through his renowned study group and other opportunities, a collaborative space for the development of critical scholarship and community engagement, and through the process, the development of critical scholars. I have benefitted immeasurably. Thank you, Nana.

I am also grateful to Rose Folson, the academic advisor to whom I was assigned upon my acceptance to OISE, for her advice, support and encouragement in those early days of this journey. I am also thankful for the helpful advice and feedback of my thesis committee members Professor Susan Padro and Professor Tara Goldstein, and to Professor Cynthia Levine-Rasky for serving as external examiner.

“As iron sharpeneth iron, so does one sharpen the countenance of a friend” (Proverbs 27:17). I would also like to acknowledge those colleagues and personal friends with whom I have been able to discuss my work. I mention in particular Dr. Erica Lawson, Elaine Brown Spencer, Paul Adjei, Arlo Kempf, and Marlon Simmons who, along with Professor Dei, would, at unexpected moments, express a great deal more confidence in my scholarship than I myself was feeling during the sometimes alienating process of graduate work.

Of course, this thesis would not have been possible without the gracious participation of the respondents who contributed their time—not to mention their wisdom and insights. I am indebted to them for their involvement.

Finally, but not at all least, I thank my family: my wife Haden for her unwavering support in myriad ways throughout this process, my children Adrian and Aleah for their patience, my parents Fay and Earle for their encouragement, and my mother-in-law, Josephine. I also thank those in my church family—most notably Pastor Colin Bryan, Evangelist Hyacinth Dias, and Elder Paul Morris who along with my family members have prayed and consistently prophesied into my life the successful end of this journey.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: POINTS OF DEPARTURE

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Terms and Usage ............................................................................................. 1
   1.2 Background: The Importance of a Critical Black Gaze upon Whiteness .......... 3
   1.3 My Subject Location and Entry Point with Respect to the Study ..................... 12
1.4 Literature Review ............................................................................................... 17
   1.3.1 Preamble ......................................................................................................... 17
   1.3.2 The Critical Study of Whiteness as Pioneered by Black Scholars ................. 17
   1.3.3 Critical Whiteness Studies and its Three Projects .......................................... 18
   1.3.4 Male feminism ................................................................................................. 29
   1.3.5 Empirical Works on Whiteness: Whites Claiming Egalitarianism ................. 32
   1.3.6 Empirical Works on Whiteness: Whites Claiming Antiracism or involved in Racial Equity Work ......................................................................................................................... 36
1.5 Significance of the Study, and Research and Learning Objectives ................... 44

## CHAPTER 2
DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORKS: THEORETICAL TOOLS FOR THINKING AND MAKING MEANING

2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 47
2.2 What is a Discursive Framework, and Why Use It? .......................................... 47
2.3 Critical Integrative Antiracism .......................................................................... 51
2.4 Afrocentricity ..................................................................................................... 55
2.5 Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) ..................................................................... 58
2.6 “Why all of these?”: Towards a Critical Race Africology of Racial Equity Collaborations ......................................................................................................................... 63

## CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: TOOLS FOR MAKING MEANING

3.1 Methodology and Methods ................................................................................ 67
   3.1.1 Interviewing as Data Collection ..................................................................... 69
   3.1.2 Grounded Theory as Research Methodology ................................................. 72
   3.1.3 The Issue of Subjectivity, Power, and Unequal Relations .............................. 76
   3.1.3.1 Undermining Unequal Relations: Informed Consent and Reciprocation ...... 80
   3.1.3.2 Undermining Racialization and Essentialism: Participant Selection, Self- Identification ......................................................................................................................... 82
   3.1.3.3 Undermining the Power to Marginalize and Romanticize: Analytical Methods and the Minority Voice ......................................................................................................................... 87
   3.1.4 Limitations of the Study .................................................................................. 93
   3.1.5 Introducing Participants ............................................................................... 94
   3.1.6 Who or What is the White Racial Equity Worker? ......................................... 98
   3.1.7 Outline of the Thesis Chapters ...................................................................... 102
CHAPTER 4
EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGY AND EPISTEMIC SALIENCE IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

4.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 105
4.2 Embodied Knowledge: Making the Case ....................................................... 106
4.3 Embodied Knowledge versus Scholastic Knowledge .................................... 112
4.4 The Question of Acquiring Embodied Race Knowledge through Association ..... 115
4.5 The Question of Extrapolating to Racial Oppression from Other Oppressions ... 120
4.6 Further Considerations of Other Oppressions in the Racial Equity Project .... 126
4.7 Balancing Black Experiential Knowledge ....................................................... 131
4.8 Significance of Black Experiential Knowledge in Racial Equity Work .......... 136
4.9 Theoretical Discussion of Embodied Racial Knowledge ............................... 142
4.9.1 Objectivist vs. Subjectivist Accounts of Race (Alcoff, 2001) ............... 143
4.9.2 Theorizing Black Embodied Knowledge .................................................. 145

CHAPTER 5
WHITENESS OPENS DOORS: INVOLVING WHITENESS IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

5.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 153
5.2 Whites should not leave it to Blacks to Challenge Racism ............................. 154
5.3 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 157
5.4 Whiteness Gives Access to Resources for Racial Equity Work ....................... 158
5.5 Whiteness Gives Racial Equity Work Access to Certain Spaces ..................... 161
5.6 Whiteness, Credibility and Competence in Racial Equity Work ................... 163
5.6.1 Whiteness can mobilize a sympathetic audience for racial equity work ..... 163
5.6.2 The inscription of partiality and incompetence upon the Black body ......... 164
5.6.3 Would it be the same if the races were reversed? James’s position .......... 171
5.6.4 Would it be the same if the races were reversed? Imani’s position ........... 176
5.7 Chapter 5 Summary ......................................................................................... 178

CHAPTER 6
THE CONTOURS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF WHITENESS AND FOR WHITE BODIES IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

6.1 Introduction: The Double-Edged Sword ....................................................... 180
6.2 Inequitable Relationships: Making the White Subject through Racial Equity Work ................................................................. 187
6.2.1 The “missionary” approach ................................................................. 187
6.2.2 Reciprocity, and expectations of gratitude .......................................... 193
6.2.3 Conclusion ............................................................................................... 197
6.3 Actively or Passively Defending White Supremacy: Abstract Liberalism within Racial Equity Work ................................................................. 197
6.3.1 Patterns of Avoidance and Failing to Stand Up for Racial Equity ........ 199
6.3.2 The Stalling Game: Privileging Process over Outcome ......................... 206
6.3.3 Conclusion ............................................................................................... 218
6.4 Shifting the Focus: Motives & Structurally-Determined White Privilege in Racial Equity Work ................................................................. 219
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4.1 When Whites benefit from racial equity roles</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.2 Cultural appropriation: When Whites benefit from racial equity alliances</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.3 Blacks who use racial equity work for personal benefit</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Of White Leaders, Champions, Ambassadors and Spokespersons</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Chapter Summary</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 7**

THE POLITICS OF RACIAL EQUITY COLLABORATION:
EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL/MORAL TERMS FOR DOING RACIAL EQUITY WORK ACROSS LINES OF RACIAL PRIVILEGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Epistemological Terms of Collaboration</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1 Whiteness and Epistemologies of Ignorance</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2 The Epistemology of Unknowing for the White Racial Equity Worker</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2.1 Unknowing Epistemic Authority: Understanding the Limits and Situatedness of White Knowledge</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2.2 Unknowing innocence: Understanding one’s implication in whiteness...</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2.3 Unknowing unlimited white agency: Understanding nonwhite community space</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 A Politics of Humility for Whites</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Ethical/Moral Terms of Collaboration</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1 The Sense of Equality</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.2 Standing Up, Naming, and Calling Racism</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.3 Taking Risks and Concretely Undermining White Privilege</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.4 Ethical/Moral Stances vs. Interest Convergence and Opportunistic Engagement</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.4.1 Interest Convergence</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.4.2 Significance of the Interest Convergence Debate to the Present Study....</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 8**

STRAINS OF RESISTANCE: BLACKS NAVIGATE THE CONTRADICTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Introduction</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Creating Space for Agency and Resistance</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1 Embodied Knowledge as Resistance: The Black “Politics of Reclamation”</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Dei et al., 2004, p. 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2 Be Anchored in the Black Community</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.3 Focus on the Goal and Don’t Sell Out!</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Micro-level strategies/Participants’ individual expressions of agency and resistance</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1 Sharon and the right not to engage</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2 James: White power in the Black body</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.3 Maryam: “Open, Honest, and Direct”</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.4 Diane: Taking Stands, Facing Consequences</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.5</td>
<td>Quentin and Strategic Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.6</td>
<td>Ajani: African-centeredness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.7</td>
<td>Keith and having Black Community Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.8</td>
<td>Terrence and Erasing his Own Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.9</td>
<td>Imani: Be Manipulative. It’s OK!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.10</td>
<td>Beverly and Resisting Placism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Towards a Critical Race Africology of Black Resistance in Racial Equity Collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 9**

**CONCLUSIONS: WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Contrasts and Similarities with Previous Research</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Further Implications of This Research</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3.1</td>
<td>Implications in the Obama Era</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3.2</td>
<td>Some Implications for Education and Pedagogy</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Directions for Further Research</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REFERENCES**

- APPENDIX I ........................................................................................................... 427
  Information Letter/Consent Form ........................................................................... 427

- APPENDIX II ......................................................................................................... 429
  Background Information Survey for Participants ............................................... 429

- APPENDIX III ....................................................................................................... 430
  Question Schedule for Interviews ......................................................................... 430

- APPENDIX IV ........................................................................................................ 432
  Examples of Interventive In-Depth Interviewing Techniques ................................ 432

- APPENDIX V ......................................................................................................... 436
  Frequency of Participant Excerpts in Thesis ...................................................... 436
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Despite the insightful analyses done by Whites within the field of critical whiteness studies, can Black people afford to leave it to Whites to name their own reality, their world? Although Black people ought to praise the autocritical explorations of white people to figure out ways to disrupt aspects of their white hegemony, they cannot abandon the task to white people (Yancy, 2004)

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Terms and Usage

This study engages in a critical examination of whiteness from a Black perspective. In particular, it develops a critical examination of racial equity collaborations between Blacks and Whites, of white racial equity work, and of white critiques of whiteness, from the perspective of Blacks1 who have worked with Whites to do racial equity work. While later sections of this chapter and Chapter 2 will present more extensive discussions of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, it is important, in order to facilitate the discussion, to define some of the contested terms that I use from the very beginning of this document. I use the terms Black, white, and nonwhite as references to racial designations and socially constructed locations within racialized societies. This does not suggest that I understand race as a biological essence. However, as I will develop further in Sections 2.3 and 3.1.3.2, I suggest that for the large majority of persons, these terms track fairly accurately the patterns of distribution of racial privilege and punishments with respect to the racial logic of Canadian society that is

1 Throughout this document, I most often use the term Black to refer to people of African ancestry as this is the most commonly used designation within the Canadian context in which the study is located. However, the terms African, African-Canadian, will also be used as determined by the context and depending upon whether I am invoking notions of the community of all peoples of African ancestry, their presence in Canada, or on matters particularly involving race and racialization. While they do have different shades of meaning which are important for particular political and social purposes, within this document the terms Black, African, African Canadian, and of African ancestry are used interchangeably.
intimately (though not neatly) tied to phenotypic characteristics and ethnic ancestry (see Dei, 1996a, p. 53; Howard, 2006, p. 49). In terms of usage, the reader will notice that I capitalize the terms Blacks, Whites, Nonwhites, etc when they stand alone and refer to groups, while I do not capitalize white, and nonwhite when they are used as descriptors (as in white men, nonwhite teachers, etc.). However, I do capitalize Black (as in Black racial equity workers, Black voice, etc) to indicate the use of this term as a political location and rallying point for people of African ancestry.

In this study, I also use the term *white supremacy*. In agreement with other scholars (e.g., Dei, 1996a, p. 53; Mills, 2003, p. 36; O'Brien, 2001, p. 5) I do not use this term to refer exclusively to legally sanctioned white racial discrimination and the ideologies of militant white power groups. As these scholars argue, while these forms of racism certainly qualify as white supremacy, they are not the only, or even the most prevalent and significant, ideologies and social arrangements that deem white people, their interests, their knowledges, and their histories to be superior to those of Nonwhites. Consequently, in this thesis I use the term *white supremacy* to refer to exactly what it implies—that is, all those behaviours and social arrangements that are invested in perpetuating (deliberately or otherwise) white-skin privilege and advantage, and that prioritize white group interests (whether recognized or taken-for-granted) over other group-based interests. This term may be used somewhat interchangeably with the term *racism* but emphasizes the way in which racially inequitable societies privilege white bodies as much as they disenfranchise those who are not white (O'Brien, 2001, p. 6). With respect to this definition, most European and North American societies qualify as white supremacist.
Finally, the term *whiteness* refers to the mechanisms through which the political and social interests, consciousness(es) and privileges associated with the location of racial dominance within white supremacist societies are deployed and maintained. Dei writes:

Whiteness is a social construction with political, cultural and economic capital. It is produced by and productive of the social contexts of power that constructs [sic] [racial] difference, normality and privilege. It is also an ideology in the way it conjures images, conceptions and promises that provide the frameworks through which dominant and other groups represent, interpret, understand and make sense of social existence. (Dei, 2000c, p. 28)

With this definition in mind, the critical examination of whiteness concerns itself with the racial moreso than ethnic/cultural aspects of white identities (Sleeter, 1993), names the social power imbalances and politics that attribute a privileged racial location to Whites, and interrogates the deployment of ideological justifications that support the continuance of white supremacy, white power, and white privilege. In the process of understanding whiteness, it is also important to note that as whiteness does its ideological and political work, it simultaneously strives to make its workings largely invisible to those benefitted by them (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b; Dei, 1999; Dei et al., 2004; McIntosh, 1990; Mills, 1997; Morrison, 1992). Where this project is successful, it results in what Mills (1997, p. 18) refers to as the white “epistemology of ignorance.”

1.1.2 Background: The Importance of a Critical Black Gaze upon Whiteness

Blacks have historically been at the forefront of antiracist activism and scholarship, and have pioneered the academic critique of whiteness both in the early and mid-twentieth century (see, e.g., Du Bois, 1935, 1921, and the many Black writers and

---

2 I undertake a much more detailed discussion of this concept in Chapter 7.
scholars cited in Roediger, 1998a), and more recently, (e.g. Baldwin, 1984; hooks, 1992b; Morrison, 1992). This is as it should be since, as I have noted above, whiteness is normalized and is usually taken for granted by those who are privileged by it; it is the social and epistemological fallback position that makes it difficult for the white subject to imagine what life would or ought to be like without it. Consequently, many have argued that whiteness is best critiqued and understood by those who are not white (Essed, 1991, pp. 8-9; Frankenberg, 1993, p. 5; Hendrix, 2002, p. 168; hooks, 1992b; Johnson, 1970/1927; Narayan, 1989, p. 264). If this methodological clarity is related to one’s distance from whiteness and the extent to which one is oppressed by whiteness, then Blackness, as the socially constructed antithesis of whiteness, and the standard against which whiteness often knows itself (Morrison, 1992, pp. 31-48), provides a particularly salient vantage point from which to study whiteness. This is not to imply that there is any actual essential and ingrained difference between the white and Black subject. Rather, it is only to underscore the notion that where whiteness is understood as normalcy and humanity, those whose existence is negated through the processes and politics of whiteness will have an indispensable vantage point and critique of these conditions. To claim the salience of the Black voice is not to romanticize it and suggest that it always has the last word on matters of race, but it is to acknowledge that the Black voice has often been silenced and negated in dominant discourses of race and needs to be reinserted.

Thus at the outset, here, while I acknowledge that it is important to understand that antiracism is about much more than a Black-white dichotomy, my frame of reference in this thesis is that of the struggle against anti-Black racism. In the present context, it is
important to speak in terms of racisms rather than racism. Each manifestation of white supremacy against Nonwhites has its own character, and consequently, calls for different, though related, analyses and strategies of resistance. However, it is my opinion that the struggle against anti-Black racism has come to be seen as outmoded—as though the battle against anti-Black racism had somehow already been won and African people no longer faced racism; as though it is the favourite flavour of a bygone month and it is now more chic to address other racisms to the exclusion of anti-Black racism, or even to address other inequities to the exclusion of all racisms altogether. This development is, of course, ironic given the racial narratives that continue to run beneath the surface in contexts that involve the interaction of Blacks with Whites and other people of Colour. For example, in the context of the 2008 United States presidential race, it has been patently obvious that race has underwritten the entire question of the candidacy of Barack Obama. Race and anti-Black racism, whether named or not, have first raised and then shaped every discussion of his legitimacy, his patriotism, his foreign policy, his family life, his education, his religious commitments, his community work, his political career, his acquaintances, and his socioeconomic status. Obama’s own freedom, or the lack thereof, to speak overtly to the political interests of Blacks in the United States and the imperative to challenge anti-Black racism has been curtailed and dictated by dominant racial discourses about Blacks. Further, anti-Black racism and white dominance have placed the onus upon Obama to prove that he is “like every other American” (read: white American) and that he is someone that (white) Americans “know” and with whom they can identify. Other less well-known personalities in the context of these discussions, such as Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, have immediately been
embraced, and have not been scrutinized to the same degree (see Wise, 2008). Finally, many legitimate questions about the possibility and future of antiracism in the Obama era have had to be raised because of the insidious colour-blind, racial discourses surrounding Obama’s candidacy and ultimate securing of the presidency that declare the end of racism in the face of some of the most egregious on-going racial inequities, such as the Jena Six debacle.

Thus, in this study I reclaim the importance of focusing on the particular conditions and struggles of African peoples against the terms of their oppression for its instructive value in the resistance of all inequity, for the philosophy and strategies for all kinds of equity struggles have been set by the struggle against anti-Black racism the world over. Consequently, my focus in this research will be upon whiteness in the particular context of anti-Black racism, though I expect that the findings and insights here will, in many instances, apply equally well to other nonwhite and oppressed groups.

Having thus established the importance of the Black critique of whiteness, I note that in the past ten to fifteen years in North America, much ostensibly antiracist activity and scholarship by Whites has arisen in the absence of a well-articulated relationship to Black antiracist discourse and practice, even while it claims to challenge white supremacy and anti-Black racism. One clear example of this is the burgeoning field of Critical Whiteness Studies in which critical discourses on whiteness have proliferated with relatively little input from Black scholars. There may be a combination of reasons for this, including:

a) critical Black scholars may have had enough of the Eurocentricity of the academy, and are reluctant to re-centre whiteness in their work. They would
rather turn their scholarly attention to subordinated Black discourses and knowledge

b) white scholars have recognized and seized the opportunity to claim a space for themselves in an academic climate where racial and ethnic studies (e.g. Black/Africana studies, Aboriginal studies, Chicana/o studies) were gaining new currency and recognition, and in which their white racial and ethnic locations had not previously been named. Critical Whiteness Studies therefore offered them an entry point into these new conversations (Andersen, 2003, p. 32; Doane, 2003, p. 6), and they claimed an epistemic privilege in the study of whiteness akin to that claimed through standpoint epistemologies.

c) White scholars have sincerely sought a legitimate critical and ethical entry point into discussions about whiteness that allow them to critique the structures that confer dominance upon their bodies.

Interestingly enough, and with respect to c) above, these burgeoning white discourses on whiteness which are independent of Black input are often justified through events of the North American Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century in North America stands as a powerful example of African agency and resistance in North America. In particular, the reassessment in the mid-1960s, after a series of letdowns by white liberals (Blauner, 1995, pp. 116, 122), of the place of white bodies in this struggle marked a defining moment in the expression of that agency. At that point, when Whites asked what they could do, the response often came back in the form, “Go and work in your own communities” (see, e.g., Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Malcolm X, 1965, pp. 286, 375), with the intention that this would mean
working with other Whites to identify, understand and challenge oppressive white privilege and power. This response has been repeated in different forms by many Black activists since then, and it is often claimed by Whites as the foundation for white antiracist organizing and scholarship (see, e.g., Aveling, 2004b, p. 57; Levine-Rasky, 2002a, p. 1; O'Brien, 2001, pp. 1-2). As they do Critical Whiteness work, then, they consider themselves to be simply “do[ing] their own work” (Levine-Rasky, 2002a, p.1) as they have been advised by Blacks to do.

However, none of these reasons justifies the fact that in the last ten years or so, critical studies of whiteness are proliferating with little input from Black scholars. First, while it is of undeniable and vital importance for Blacks to investigate subordinated discourses and the strategies of resistance that the racially oppressed undertake, it is also necessary for them to lay bare discourses of whiteness and racial dominance. This is crucial, and creates balance in the study of racialized societies by

a) undermining the tendency to see the racially oppressed as the source and location of the problem of racism

b) recognizing the vital symbiotic connection between nonwhite oppression and white privilege, and

c) inverting the racially dominant gaze, mitigating the tendency to perpetually commodify and objectify the racial “Other” by means of the academic/researcher gaze.

Further, as Black scholars, we have a responsibility to our community/ies to participate in and even define for ourselves the terms of discourses that affect us.
Second, as I have argued above, whiteness is least visible to, and where seen, often denied (sometimes strategically, sometimes ignorantly) by, those who are benefitted by it. Thus the notion of white epistemic privilege in the study of whiteness is not well founded. Whiteness is so deeply invested in establishing hegemony and in strategically presenting itself as innocent and inherently good even while it claims dominance (Huhnsdorf, 2001, p. 116) that the assertion that white people may have the best insight into their own raced-ness and its meaning is deeply problematic. Thus, the combination of Black epistemic salience and white epistemic limitation suggest that critical whiteness work ought not to be left *solely* to Whites, as the epigraph that opens this chapter so eloquently expresses. The notion of Black epistemic salience captures the importance of building multicentric political diversity and interests into discussions of race and matters that affect Black people by having the Black voice at the table.

Third, in examining the claim that it is Blacks who have suggested that Whites “do their own work,” I note the following: If the turn of events in the mid-1960s is, indeed, understood as a moment in the expression of African agency, the essence of the intended message in its particular historical context would have been that Blacks could do our own work without what sometimes seemed to manifest itself as white unreliability or as paternalistic white intervention. Thus, whatever else it might have meant, it cannot convincingly be argued that the Black leaders who advised Whites to work in their own communities were suggesting that effective antiracist work by Whites could or should be done independently of Black input, and/or in ways that are antagonistic to Black racial equity work or Black agency.
I think it is also important to note here that I am not only concerned about Whites who are insincerely or opportunistically involved in the critical study of whiteness. Rather, I am also very much concerned about those Whites who undertake this work in all sincerity. These concerns are consistent with my understanding of the constraints imposed by whiteness upon white individuals regardless of their politics. I argue that even upon becoming critical, the residual effect of discourses that normalize, privilege, and prioritize whiteness, and the way in which these discourses are insidiously presented as part of societal common sense in ways and through avenues of which one is often not even aware (Gramsci, 1971), make it such that the critical white identity is still prone to certain types of theoretical and methodological lapses that may, in the end, support a racist status quo. As Yancy puts it, “[t]he white semiotic space within which Whites move and have their being far exceeds their intentions. Hence, Whites can have good intentions, but what is to be done when one’s whiteness carries a surplus of significations over and above such intentions?” (Yancy, 2004, pp. 16-17).

These observations about the implications of racial location in Critical Whiteness Studies, which can be framed as a component of racial equity work in the academy, may be generalized to the broader context of racial equity work beyond the academy. The questions and concerns I have raised above are questions that have relevance for white racial equity work wherever it occurs, and for what the state, nature, and effects of collaborations between Blacks and Whites in this work are or ought to be. What might Whites “doing their own work” look like in other contexts and what might the connection of this work be to Black racial equity work? Are there ways in which this work, which is ostensibly in support of the cause of eradicating anti-Black racism, might undermine that
cause if done in isolation? And if, as I suggest, the work of white racial equity workers ought to be informed by the work of Black racial equity workers, what exactly does this kind of collaboration presently look like, and what, from the perspective of Blacks ought it to look like ideally? Collaborations between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work will and must continue to occur (Dei, 1996a, p. 38) as concerned humans from all locations mobilize to challenge racial and other oppressions. However, it is absolutely imperative, for the reasons discussed above, that the space be available to negotiate terms for these alliances that are respectful, do not undermine Black agency, and which promote the effective functioning of these alliances.

With these matters in mind, then, the learning objectives of this study are as follows:

a) To reinsert, and reassert the importance of, Black perspectives in/to theoretical discussions about white dominance and how it might be challenged.

b) To generate (local and context-specific) grounded theory about how racial location shapes the context of racial equity work and collaborations

c) To develop an ontology of whiteness in the context of racial equity collaborations, and to complicate the theoretical understanding of antiracist white identity,

and

d) To explore the ways in which Black racial equity workers resist whiteness and establish their agency as necessary within these contexts.
1.2 My Subject Location and Entry Point with Respect to the Study

This study grows directly out of my experience as a Black, male, African-centered antiracist educator, activist, and academic in the Canadian context. In my own experience in professional settings, there are no education professionals—teachers, administrators, support workers etc.—and few other Whites, who would openly claim to be racist. Indeed, I have found the opposite—that is, that most Whites would claim to stand firmly for matters of racial and cultural equity. However, despite my years of experience, I am continually taken aback by the sometimes subtle, often blatant, but very routine manner in which many of these same individuals—most of them white—habitually enact whiteness in their thinking, behaviour, practice(s) and policies. That is, they behave in ways that ultimately support the marginalization of, and discrimination against, Nonwhite students, colleagues and communities, and that entrench the racist status quo. Among educators, these may include matters such as the failure to include curricular material that is relevant to students of Colour, the climate of low expectations for Black students, “failure to notice” the racial profiling, over-surveillance and over-penalization of Black students, and the pathologizing of nonwhite nations, peoples, and ways of being. Of course, much of this contradiction is made possible by the unspoken “taboos” (Schofield, 1989; see also Kailin, 1999; Lipman, 1997) around explicitly mentioning race, working in tandem with the unrestrained practice of invoking race

---

3 Large portions of this section have been taken from a previous publication (Howard, 2006, pp. 44-45)

4 While it is important to consider the role of the racially oppressed subject who has internalized the oppressive ideologies and therefore enacts whiteness, (and there is much scholarship to this effect), here I turn the gaze upon the racially dominant. While these differently located subjects may both enact whiteness, they differ significantly in how they are positioned. As I observe elsewhere, “[u]ltimately, the domination of Non-whites, whether by Whites or other Nonwhites, always works in favour of the racially dominant and the maintenance of existing mainstream hierarchies of race, which position Whites at the top (Howard, 2008, p. 42).
through the “coded language of racism” (Kailin, 1999; see also Dei, 1996b; Lipman, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Morrison, 1992, p. 6). Thus, colourblind notions, rooted in white privilege, that frame curricular decisions for students who are essentialized as Canadian without acknowledging the diversity within that construction; the insistence that all students’ academic needs are addressed, alongside the refusal to collect and analyze race-based achievement statistics that might verify this; the use of ostensibly neutral terms in ways that infuse racialized meanings (such as “immigrant,” “at-risk,” “the students from Ajax or Scarborough,” “the students from the apartments,” are all examples of invoking race without explicitly naming it, thereby enabling the continuance of a racially inequitable status quo. These strategies cloak expressions of racism with a veneer of liberal acceptability, and are part and parcel of the way that whiteness argues its own innocence.

I have long been concerned with the intersection of this claim of egalitarianism with the enactment of whiteness by those making these claims. What caused this blindness or willful ignorance—this “dysconsciousness” (King, 1991)? What exactly in the identity formation of racially dominant subjects enabled this phenomenon? This intellectual curiosity has, in large part, fuelled my involvement in community initiatives that support students of colour, as well as my interest in formally studying whiteness, racism, and processes of racialization. Indeed, this dynamic was the subject of my Master’s thesis in which I examined common-sense ideological racism as it manifested among educators in the Quebec English-language school system (Howard, 2002). Data gathered during that study strongly suggested that those white teachers whose actions seemed to contradict their claims to racial egalitarianism were also those who
acknowledged the existence of white racism while failing to implicate themselves in it (Howard, 2002, p. 51). White racism, for them, was always perpetrated by someone else, somewhere else, or in some other time period. Thus, it seemed clear to me that a large part of challenging white racism would entail exposing everyday enactments of whiteness, coming to understand the formation of racially dominant subjectivity, and laying bare the implication of the white body in white supremacy at both the macro-sociological and micro-sociological levels.

Given that I came to the academy seeking a space where these everyday Canadian realities could be named openly, understood, and challenged in the midst of the hegemonic Euro-North American context that handles these issues with silence and denial, it was with much consternation that in a number of instances within the critical academy, I found classes and forums with an express antiracist raison d'être that, in their pedagogical approaches, failed to challenge this denial and distancing. Unlike in the school system, I now found that there was critical talk about whiteness; however, very much like in the school system, I found white individuals speaking about whiteness as something happening in a nebulous “out there” and having relatively little to do with themselves. They seemed to make no connections about how they might personally be implicated in these relations of domination, and seemed to draw no implications about how they might personally resist whiteness and construct oppositional white identities. Further, little, if anything, in the way these spaces were structured or in their guidelines for engagement challenged this phenomenon. This is in marked contrast to the important, but often hyper-critical demand upon nonwhite bodies in the academy to justify their

---

5 I use the term Euro-North America to refer to the European and North American states (otherwise known as Western) whose histories and present include significant manifestations of white supremacy rooted in the colonization and domination of other states and peoples.
resistance discourses and examine the implications of their/our locations in those discourses. Further, when students of Colour, myself included, pointed out these contradictions, I found it quite intriguing that the responses tended to dismiss our concerns and present all the reasons why our concerns were misguided, even if they seemed real to us. In other words, nonwhite perspectives were patronized and marginalized, while white perspectives were centered—and this within the very contexts that claimed to challenge these processes. These encounters often left me feeling profoundly perturbed, and often angry. How could antiracist change occur under these circumstances?

My experience in racial equity initiatives in multiracial groups outside the academy has been very similar. In these contexts, it seemed that the energies of my white colleagues were directed more toward encouraging me to attenuate my outrage with the racial inequity we were supposed to be challenging than with strategizing effective ways to disrupt that racial inequity. These experiences left me unsure of who my allies really were, and with doubts about the potential of these collaborations to work for true antiracist change.

The manifestation of whiteness in these contexts is particularly troublesome since by virtue of their participation in initiatives or scholarship that oppose(s) white racism, these Whites who are manifesting whiteness may fail to entertain the possibility that they indeed could! That is, many seem unaware of their susceptibility to reinscribing the very racist dominance they claimed to oppose, and unaware of their need to be watchful in this regard. Likewise, they seemed unaware of the value of the nonwhite voice and perspective in helping to hold them accountable to the racial equity cause. Further, in
conjunction with this lack of reflexivity are a host of questionable common-sense assumptions that prevail with respect to what racial equity work is, and who is an antiracist. For example, it is thought that having a spouse or family member of Colour, living in a mixed-race or predominantly nonwhite neighbourhood, or having an academic interest in antiracism are, by themselves, guarantees of white antiracist identity. The metaphor of inoculation (Rains, 1998) serves to illustrate this problem. If a white racial equity worker feels “inoculated” and, therefore, immune to enacting whiteness, but the efficacy of the vaccine used for inoculation (in this case one’s participation in antiracist discourse or action and/or one’s personal relationships to Nonwhites) is questionable, this white racial equity worker may very well be as, or more, susceptible to the “disease” of white dominance as/than the white subject who does not consider herself so inoculated. Unfortunately, they are seldom the ones who get sick if they catch the disease. The enactment of whiteness is always at the expense of racialized bodies.

As a final note in this section, I happily acknowledge the fact that I have had the pleasure of working upon racial equity projects with a number of Whites whose work I considered respectful, who were concerned about the ways that they might reinscribe whiteness within our collaborative efforts, who therefore took pains to be mindful of how they were located in our relationship, and who valued the insights and input of their Black colleagues. This study seeks to determine how Black racial equity workers like myself might make distinctions between those collaborations that are respectful and those that are not.
1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Preamble

This literature review will begin with a critical exploration of the theoretical literature within critical whiteness studies in order to mine what this work tells us indirectly about Black-white collaboration in critical racial equity projects. It will also offer a quick overview of some of the themes in male feminist literature, an academic domain that I argue is analogous to that of Critical Whiteness Studies in that these literatures are both written by members of dominant groups to (ostensibly) challenge their own dominance. Finally, I do a review of empirical studies investigating white egalitarianism, and a thorough review of those empirical studies addressing Whites engaging in racial equity work or who claim antiracist identities. The review of these bodies of literature will help to outline the theoretical status of critical projects that involve racially dominant identities in the project to undermine racial dominance. It will also specify knowledge deficits and highlight the areas where Black perspectives have been omitted or elided and need to be reinserted. Finally, the review will also sketch out the implications for collaborations between Blacks and Whites in antiracist projects. This literature review serves only as a point of departure and, in keeping with the place of literature in a grounded theory approach, more literature will be integrated in later chapters during the discussion of the research findings.

1.3.2 The Critical Study of Whiteness as Pioneered by Black Scholars

The late 1980s and the 1990s have seen the naming of the study of whiteness as Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). Since the emergence of CWS as a field of study with a name, this whiteness work has been done largely by white scholars. However, it is
important for the purposes of this review to note that the critical academic analysis of
whiteness was pioneered much earlier by Black scholars (Baldwin, 1966, 1984; Bennett,
1966; Clark, 1966; Du Bois, 1921, 1935; Lomax, 1966) and this work contained many of
the insights that are only now becoming popular in the academy. For example, it was Du
Bois (1935, pp. 700-701) who first advanced the notion of the substantive material value
of whiteness for the white worker and how it functioned to supplement the white
worker’s salary in ways that Black workers who may have earned the same salaries could
not expect. Except for Dyer’s article *White* (1997) that preceded it, even the recent
critical academic interest in whiteness was largely pioneered by Black scholars. There
was, for example, Morrison (1992) who examined the unmarked project of whiteness in
American fiction authored by Whites, arguing that Blackness was employed within this
literature as the background against and through which white identity could be known;
hooks (1992b) who pointed out that though Blacks have so often been the object of the
white gaze, Whites do not (or at least did not at that time) often seriously entertain the
notion that this gaze could be returned; and Harris (1993) who argued that in the United
States (but presumably also in other white supremacist states) whiteness has property
value that is legally supported and defended. These early works argue that the symbolic
and material dimensions of whiteness to which they drew attention need to be
interrogated if we are to truly understand racism and its intractability in contemporary
Euro-North American societies.

1.3.3 **Critical Whiteness Studies and its Three Projects**

The Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) work that began to emerge in the late
1980s and the 1990s, then, picks up the threads of this early Black literature on
whiteness, though it is only in some instances that the white scholars producing this work acknowledge their indebtedness to these Black scholars. A notable exception in this regard is David Roediger. In his seminal work, *The Wages of Whiteness* (Roediger, 1991), Roediger situates his work among the work of Black scholars who have examined whiteness (p. 6), and openly declares the work to be developing Du Bois’s theory on the material value of whiteness (p. 12). His later work (Roediger, 1998a) compiles an impressive collection of Black writings about whiteness, whereby he argues that whiteness has long been the subject of Black intellectual curiosity.

CWS is organized around three movements or projects according to Rodriguez (2000, p. 3). These projects are roughly chronological, but the distinctions between the works that comprise these movements are more correctly understood in terms of what they attempt to accomplish. The writings of the first movement worked with the then newly popular notion of racial formation and race as a flexible social construct (Omi & Winant, 1986), and were most often historical works exploring the development of whiteness as a social construct with material implications. Among these works are Roediger’s (1991) work mentioned earlier; Ignatiev (1995) which traces the history of Irish immigrants in the United States, and the way they were able to trade their ethnic identity for white privilege by distancing themselves from Blacks; Lopez (1996) which traces the way that whiteness in the United States has been defined by law, and how this legal construction has continually changed to preserve the privileges of whiteness for white people; and later Lipsitz’s (1998) argument that the intractability of racial inequity has at least as much to do with Whites’ refusal to relinquish the privileges of whiteness as
it has to do with prejudicial attitudes; and Brodkin’s (1998) attempt to trace how Jewish immigrants came to be accepted as white in the United States.

Other notable studies in this first project of Critical Whiteness Studies were sociological, and sought to explicate the meaning of whiteness to the lives of white subjects (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993), and in popular culture in Euro-North America (Dyer, 1997). A key study in the field of education fitting into this first project is that of McIntyre (1997).

Thus, these first project works sought to establish an empirically grounded theoretical understanding of whiteness as social location, exposing normalized whiteness, and interrogating its oppressive characteristics. These studies all served to establish that racial location, and whiteness in particular, is not given, but rather is constructed through social and legal processes, and often through deliberate individual and collective action, to produce a social concept with powerful material implications for Whites as well as Nonwhites.

As far as providing a context for this study is concerned, the mostly white writers of the first project in Critical Whiteness Studies seem motivated by a desire to make sense of whiteness and its impact on their own lives. Their work seems to seek ways of being accountable for racial inequity within social arrangements that work to conscript them into white supremacy. For example, in her introduction Frankenberg writes:

Calling the project a study of white women and racism marked out the set of concerns that motivated me to begin it, namely, emphasizing that racism was and is something that shapes white women’s lives, rather than something people of color have to live and deal with in a way that bears no relationship or relevance to the lives of white people. For when white people—and I was especially concerned about white feminists, since the project had its origins in the feminist movement—look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue that people of color
face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us. (1993, pp. 5-6)

Similarly Lipsitz, in his introduction writes:

I think I know now why Bill Moore’s murder affected me so deeply in 1963. His actions forced my first confrontations with the possessive investment in whiteness—a poisonous system of privilege that pits people against each other and prevents the creation of common ground. Exposing, analyzing, and eradicating this pathology is an obligation that we all share, white people most of all. I hope that this book will be a step in that direction. (1998, p. xix)

Finally, in Roediger’s introduction, after describing the racist context of his upbringing and his own indifference to it throughout most of his youth, writes:

Until very recently, I would have skipped all this autobiographical material, sure that my ideas on race and the white working class grew out of conscious reflection based on historical research. But much of that reflection led back to what my early years might have taught me: the role of race in defining how white workers look not only at Blacks but at themselves; the pervasiveness of race; the complex mixture of hate, sadness and longing in the racist thought of white workers; the relationship between race and ethnicity. My own youthful experiences—and they were not different, except in outcome, from those of many white working class kids at the time—could have given me the central themes of this book. (1991, p. 5)

In these three excerpts from CWS first project texts, the authors appear to be grappling with how they are implicated in the workings of whiteness, and do not seem to attempt to draw sharp lines of distinction between themselves and other Whites. Clearly, they are motivated to end racism, and consider their work a part of this effort, but they seem not to be concerned with distancing themselves from other Whites in ways that diminish their own accountability and responsibility as Whites in white supremacist society. This is an important distinction between the first project in CWS and the other projects. The white writers in the second and third projects seem to be occupied with what to do about whiteness. This often translates, in practice, into a distancing
themselves from their implication in white supremacy that resulted from a particular short-sightedness about the intractable workings of whiteness.

The second project in CWS involved the discourse around the *abolition* of whiteness (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Ignatiev, 2005; Roediger, 1994). Writings in this project argue that since race is socially constructed, whiteness can be “abolished” if sufficient numbers of those identified as white become “race traitors” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996)—that is, if they refuse to accept that identification and take every available opportunity to oppose white supremacy and its attempt to co-opt them into it (Ignatiev, 2005, pp. 5-6). Though, in my opinion, this project has much theoretically to commend it, it falls short on two points:

1) in many ways, it positions class relations as the fundamental element of analysis, and sees white supremacy as an ideology whose primary purpose is the mystification of class relations and interests. For example, Ignatiev writes, “with color no longer serving as a handy guide for the distribution of penalties and rewards, European-Americans of the downtrodden class would at last be compelled to face with sober senses their real condition of life and their relations with humankind” (Ignatiev, 2005, p. 5). This appears to miss the importance of race as an element of the analysis of inequity in its own right (see Omi & Winant, 1993)

2) it fails to grasp fully the structural dimensions of whiteness that come into play based simply on the phenotypic characteristics of the white body, and which make becoming a “race traitor” a lot more easily said than done. For example, the fact that one’s white body attracts white privilege before one
has the chance to object—that one actually has to be aware of when the terms of whiteness are at play in order to make the choice to oppose it—makes this project much more difficult (if not impossible) to live than it is to theorize.

Thus, what is limited about this project is not so much the strategies it asks its adherents to use to disrupt whiteness (where it is possible to enact them), but rather the way it generates a sense of white agency that is not always, if at all, possible, and that does not give adequate attention to the complexity and durability of racist and white supremacist structures. This error is itself a function of whiteness.

The writings of the third project in CWS are most often a response and reaction to the second project. Works in this project include Wray and Newitz (1997), Newitz and Wray (1997a, 1997b), Giroux (1997a, 1997b), Rodriguez (1998), Rodriguez & Villaverde (2000), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998, 2000), Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault (1998), and Hartigan (1997, 2000, 2002, 2003), among others. Noting that abolitionists are proposing an abolition of whiteness that is untenable, they argue instead for the *rearticulation* of whiteness. This rearticulation entails theorizing oppositional ways of being white in which whiteness might be deconstructed, complicated and reconstructed in progressive ways to mean something other than dominance. Interestingly enough, the tone of these third project writings suggests that the source of these scholars’ dissatisfaction with the second project is the notion that whiteness cannot be redeemed, and the consequent implications for themselves as Whites

---

6 Portions of this critique of the third project in CWS have been lifted from an earlier published work, Howard, 2004, pp. 72-75.
who oppose racism. For example, Newitz and Wray write (about the concept of white trash):

Perhaps white trash can also provide a corrective to what has been called a ‘vulgar multiculturalist’ assumption that whiteness must always equal terror and racism. It is our wish that ‘white trash,’ and White Trash [the title of their edited work], start to lay the groundwork for a form of white identity that is comfortable with multiculturalism, and with which multiculturalism is comfortable as well (1997a, p. 5).

and Giroux (1997a) wants to “move beyond the view of ‘whiteness’ as simply a trope of domination” (p. 296) and create “a theoretical language in which White youth can refuse to reference their Whiteness only through the common experience of racism and oppression” (p. 294). This angst seems to betray a failure to distinguish between whiteness as system of dominance and white identities as the various ways that white bodies cooperate or resist how their bodies are co-opted into this system. The shortcomings of this project are located in the way that this rearticulation is attempted, as I explain below.

The third project critique of the second project, and the way that the third project attempts the task of re-articulating whiteness, is through the claim that the second project is essentialist (see, e.g., Wray & Newitz, 1997). Consequently, as we have seen in the quote from Newitz and Wray above, the rearticulation project has often also involved complicating white identities with other axes of oppression—most often class and socio-economic status (e.g., Hartigan, 2002, 2003; Wray & Newitz, 1997), but also gender and sexuality (e.g., Rodriguez, 1998). It is indeed true that the white individual is never only white, but is also gendered, classed, sexed, and dis/abled. However, the third project writings often extrapolate this argument to limits that attempt to undermine the very real consequences of being raced. To establish the instability and complexity of the notion of
race does not mean either that race is any less important, or that the notion of racism is likewise destabilized (Razack, 1998a, p. 165). The white body, all other axes of marginalization held constant, still affords privilege with respect to nonwhite bodies.

On an even more grave note, this project, like the second project, seems to largely centre the interests of Whites or white antiracists, and fails to fully appreciate the structural dimensions of whiteness. Both second and third projects seem to come to these pitfalls through their common concern about doing something about their own whiteness, overestimating the agency of individual Whites to alter their positioning within racist structures. Certainly, doing something about whiteness is an important goal, and all those who oppose racial inequity ought to be occupied with dismantling white supremacy. However, the somewhat personal motives of these white scholars in attempting to carve out a critical and other-than-white (in the case of abolitionists) or other-than-white-racist7 (in the case of the rearticulationsits) space for themselves seems to re-centre white interests, and skew their analyses in the direction of overestimating individual white agency. Paradoxically, then, these ostensibly antiracist projects, though defined as separate projects by Rodriguez (2000, p. 3), are similar in that they shift the emphasis of CWS from that of exposing normalized white supremacy (first project) to that of locating the white person who opposes racism. They seek to expand the available subject positions, legitimacy, and mobility of the white body in a context that has only just begun to talk about the horror of white racism and the complicity of white racial identities in the oppression of Nonwhites. These scholars might have benefitted from the realization to which Scheurich has come, where he asserts: “That we as Whites are at our core white

---

7 It should be understood that “white racist,” here, does not necessarily mean “white bigot,” but rather “white subject located structurally as dominant in social relations of race.”
racists no matter how hard we work against racism must be accepted, said, repeated. We must always carry and speak this explicitly in our understanding, in our publications, in our actions (2002, p. 8).

It is important to note that, in contrast to the first project, these projects consist of relatively few empirical studies, particularly in the sociological domain (Andersen, 2003; Doane, 2003). A notable exception is the work of Hartigan (1997, 2000, 2002, 2003), who is an anthropologist. Yet Hartigan applies to race a particular anthropological approach to understanding culture such that he de-emphasises the pervasive salience of connections to broader, quite static, dominant narratives of race and class (see Hartigan, 2002, p. 140-141). Consequently, Hartigan’s work demonstrates the depths to which the CWS third project work can sink if it is deployed without historicizing racial inequity and without meticulous attention to the overall project of undermining white dominance. For example, Hartigan’s (2002) article examines the 1992 events around the decision by the Detroit Board of Education to place a school with an Afrocentric focus within an all-white, mostly working class neighbourhood to which the (mostly Black) students of the new school would need to be bussed. This article makes the very important argument that the discursive and semiotic fields within which conclusions are made about which whites are racist are simultaneously classed in such a way that working class whites bear the brunt of this accusation while middle and upper class whites are largely absolved. As such, Hartigan complicates whiteness with class. Yet Hartigan goes much further, appearing to seek to absolve the working class whites in this particular dispute from having motivations that are indeed rooted in racism. He works with a limited

---

8 The term racist, and its application to individuals on the basis of their behaviour is, itself, quite problematic, and undermines the more important concerns about what discourses and systemic/institutional processes normalize whiteness and hold white supremacy in place.
understanding of racism that speaks only to treating people poorly based on skin colour alone (pp. 150, 152). He points out their concerns that the new school is “separatist” and that it is “resegregating our children” (p. 152), and that the school may cause the community to relive the events of an era “in the late 1960s or 1970s, a period of intense violence as the student population shifted from majority-white to majority-black” (p. 147), without recognizing how firmly these concerns, or more precisely how they come to them, are rooted in whiteness. Thus, as Oliver writes, Hartigan manages to “attribute racist intentions to everything but racism” (Oliver, 2002, p. 1273). Hartigan’s article, then, is an example of how, in the process of complicating white antiracist identity and pointing to the overlap of discourses of race and class, one can, in the extreme, find ways of renaming what would seem to be racially motivated actions. This kind of work bears many of the marks of conservative and reactionary racial politics that seeks to bolster whiteness and maintain racial inequity. Consequently, studies such as these may be considered Whiteness Studies, but can by no means be considered to have critical antiracist potential.

The particular way of classifying the literature that I have employed here has served my project of highlighting the shifts in agency and white interest within Critical Whiteness Studies, and the way that these might eclipse the goals of an antiracist project. Levine-Rasky, whose own empirical work in the Canadian context (2000) fits into the first project, also wonders what the distinction might be between whiteness studies and critical whiteness studies (2002b, p. 338). Using quite a different method for classifying

---

9 Concerns about the curriculum are legitimate if the curriculum did indeed intend to teach what Hartigan asserts it did. However, understanding the hot contestation around Afrocentricity and how this is misconstrued by media (as we have seen recently in Toronto), it is likely that many of these concerns were themselves, constructed through a distorting lens of whiteness.
the Critical Whiteness literature, she delineates three different projects within this
literature—critical, relational, and contextual—simultaneously proposing these as
possible standards that might be used to evaluate the antiracist potential of this work
(2002b). Part of what concerns her is the abolitionist literature—which I, after Rodriguez
(2000), have called the second project of CWS. Ultimately, she raises questions (2002a,
pp. 11-12; 2002b) about the tensions that are clearly evident in the project of white
identities studying whiteness. Nevertheless, Levine-Rasky also gestures toward the ways
in which the field of Critical Whiteness Studies is constructed such that it seems, by
definition, to exclude the Black voice (2002b, p. 343) though these voices have made
such crucial and pioneering contributions to the scholarly understanding of the concept of
whiteness.

Therefore, through the review of the literature so far, I point to the conspicuous
scarcity of Black voices from most of the current CWS literature despite its roots in
Black scholarly thought, and point particularly to the absence of Black voices in the
second and third projects. I speculate, then, about what the critique of whiteness and the
effort to theorize oppositional white identities might have looked like, and whether some
of the pitfalls of the second and third projects might have been avoided, had Black
scholars maintained critical input into this domain, and had Black voices been sought out
as part of CWS efforts. The present study aspires to contribute to addressing this
omission, and offers responses, from the perspectives of Black racial equity workers, to
the tensions inherent in the racial equity projects undertaken by Whites.
1.3.4 Male feminism

As we consider the literature of the second and third projects in Critical Whiteness Studies and discuss the theoretical pitfalls of this work, I think it instructive here to make comparisons to another similar consideration—that of male feminism.

If we recognize white power and supremacy (not white individuals) as the focus of the challenge in racial equity work and the barrier to the liberation of Nonwhites, and if we are to hold to the notion that the white body does not easily or ever divest of the power and privilege that accrues to it, then employing white bodies in racial equity work must necessarily be a complex and contradictory process. I point out here that this is not the same critique as that within nonwhite/third world feminisms of white feminist discourse (see, e.g. Carby, 1982; Crenshaw, 1989, 1997a; Razack, 1998a), for these critiques primarily address the problem with essentialist notions of gender that flatten out racial and other differences. Rather, the dynamic discussed in this study addresses the complications of struggling against a specific oppression alongside those who reap privilege from the existence of that oppression. The analogous dynamic for feminist work, then, would be that of men working alongside women in work that challenges patriarchal relations. I discuss this in the following paragraphs in order to draw parallels to white racial equity work.

There is an existing literature about male feminism (Adu-Poku, 2001; Ashe, 2004; Breeze, 2007; Connell, 1995; Ikard, 2002; Stormer, 2001). Not surprisingly, some of this literature (e.g., Adu-Poku, 2001; Ashe, 2004; Connell, 1995) objects to the notion that there could be limits and contradictions associated with a male feminist identity. The

---

10 The equivalent of this in the context of racial equity work, which is taken up in Crenshaw’s (1989, 1997a) work and mentioned by participants in this study, would be the gender dynamics that occur between men and women of Colour doing racial equity work together.
arguments in these writings take an approach that considers how intersections of other identities such as race and sexuality might destabilize traditional conceptions of maleness and femaleness. Not surprisingly, much (though not all) of the literature presenting such arguments is written by men who claim a feminist identity. These writings correspond to the equally problematic literature in the second and third projects of Critical Whiteness Studies discussed above, which is written largely by Whites claiming antiracist identities, and which uses an analogous strategy of attempting to destabilize racially dominant identities by arguing that they are complicated by other identifications. In other words, dominant (white or male) identities are complicated in order to undermine the complexity of the white antiracist or male feminist identities respectively. In both instances, the complexity of dominant identities is important to recognize and consider, but ought not to be engaged with a view toward undermining arguments that point out the contradictions inherent in these oppositional identities.

Fortunately, much of the literature on male feminism is more nuanced, addressing the contradictions inherent in men taking up feminist identities (Awkward, 1995; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Stormer, 2001). This literature faces these important considerations head-on, and asks questions such as: “Why the trepidation in talking about the obvious transgression of such an identity and the act of mortification in noticing it?” (Stormer, 2001, p. 16). It also makes declarations such as:

… in discussions whose apparent function is a foregrounding of both obstacles to and possibilities of a male feminism, men’s relation(s) to the discourse can never go “without saying”; for the foreseeable future at least, this relation needs necessarily to be rigorously and judiciously theorized … . (Awkward, 1995, p. 44).

and voices realizations that as men take up feminism:
There is a painful familiarity in women’s history being spoken for them by men [...] of unpaid domestic labour being valuable to men (this time as a credentialing knowledge), of rape culture being perpetuated by men (this time as fact rather than act), of male dominance being forcefully stated (this time with dominance attacking dominance). (Stormer, 2001, pp. 18-19)

Ultimately, the conclusion to be drawn is that the body matters in feminist work and that different power and privilege accrue to bodies depending upon on gender location, which is usually read off from the body. Similarly, analogous questions, declarations, and realizations are in order within white racial equity work, and the conclusion ought to be that the body matters in racial equity work. With the exception of the work of a few scholars such as Scheurich (2002) and O’Brien (2001, 2003), these considerations are seldom addressed in Critical Whiteness Studies and other forms of white antiracism. This thesis represents an addition to this important literature.

Therefore, significant gaps become apparent in the Critical Whiteness literature and the way that it is approached when it is compared to the male feminist literature. This certainly cannot be because male feminism has been around longer than white racial equity work. Indeed, much of the male feminist work is more recent. I suggest that the comparatively poorly developed theorizing of the terms of white racial equity work is rooted in the common-sense tendency in this historical moment of strategic colour-blindness to see gender (as opposed to sex) as more clearly embodied and therefore more relevant than the embodiment of race—though we understand both to be socially constructed rather than biological.

This study, then, seeks to challenge the post-modern, deconstructive tendency to undermine all identities and question all boundaries in the name of equity (see Dei, 2008c) to the extent that oppressed groups are left with nowhere to stand and no territory
to claim as their own (Asante, 2003, p. 45). Thus, some male feminist literature draws attention to the diverse ways in which male and female identities are lived, and concludes correctly that there is no monolithic male or female experience. However, this process has gone too far where the leap is made to saying that some distinctions between maleness and femaleness are spurious enough to render meaningless the interrogations and scrutiny to which male feminists are subjected. I suggest that the same is true for white antiracism. This study argues that race is salient (Dei, 2000c, pp. 30-31) regardless of the diverse identities within any group designated as a race. It therefore seeks to supplement and complicate the way that the white antiracist identity is theorized.

1.3.5 Empirical Works on Whiteness: Whites Claiming Egalitarianism

The paucity of empirical work on whiteness in the sociological domain since the 1990s, contrasts sharply with the abundance of studies in the field of education (about pedagogy in antiracism teacher education classrooms), and in the field of communication. The studies I speak about in this section are concerned with the way that Whites claiming (racial) egalitarianism deal with issues of whiteness. These studies do not address white racial equity work or those Whites claiming antiracist identities, however I briefly review them here, looking particularly at their methodological approaches in order to further describe the knowledge deficit that my study endeavours to address.

In general, these studies (e.g., Aveling, 2002, 2004a; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Lawrence, 1997; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005) concern themselves with
a) white students’ attitudes and ideologies (which they attribute largely to whiteness),

b) with teaching white students and teacher candidates about whiteness in order to mitigate their participation in supporting racial inequity, and

c) with circumventing white resistance to the teaching of this material

Thus, it would appear that this literature is in many ways based on the largely untested theoretical third project literature on rearticulating whiteness through a “pedagogy of whiteness” (Giroux, 1997a, 1997b; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, 2000; Rodriguez, 1998, 2000) seeking to encourage/create antiracist white identities through pedagogy.

These studies offer a great deal of conjecture with respect to helping white students understand their whiteness and white privilege through classroom encounters. Nevertheless, the location of many of these studies in the domain of teacher education speaks to the tendency to view racial inequity through the liberal individualist lens whereby racism is largely attributed to ignorance, which (it is posited) is alleviated by education. True to the CWS third project, this approach tends to underestimate the structural and state imposed nature of whiteness, and belies the historical evidence suggesting that ignorance has never been the main reason for the persistence of white dominance (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 309)11. While the authors of these studies usually situate their work in an understanding of the structural nature of whiteness, some of the studies themselves tend to fail to make meaningful connections to these larger social structures or to suggest structurally based approaches to solving the dilemmas they address.

---

11 Interestingly, Chubbuck’s study is, itself, located in psychology rather than sociology. However, this article looks at the psychology of the white identity as it contributes to the intractability of the social location of whiteness.
Other studies (Jackson & Heckman, 2002; Goldstein, 2001; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Schick, 2002; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996) examine the same social situations, but, to varying degrees, make connections to social subject positions and larger social structures. These studies do the important work of providing some insight into the sociological meanings of whiteness and the way it is manifest in societal structures. They thus contribute to the literature exposing normalized whiteness.

However, I suggest that the works mentioned in this section still leave some stones unturned—particularly with respect to resistance and the disruption of whiteness. The novelty of making whiteness and white racial identity the focus of academic scrutiny has been enticing to researchers, and certainly provides a welcome break from the continual commoditization of the lives and experiences of who are not white. However, many of these studies focus their energies on strategies for raising Whites’ awareness of whiteness, assuming that this awareness will lead to significant social change. While this assumption may or may not be valid, these studies tend not to provide as much insight into other ways of resisting whiteness, and certainly, they do not significantly include nonwhite perspectives or the ways whiteness might be understood and/or resisted by Nonwhites. Nonwhite voices are quite absent from this literature. Overall, the essence of many of these studies is partially captured in the title of a study by Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore (2002)—“White women teaching white women about white privilege . . .” (emphasis added). In other words, the major players and subject positions attended to in these studies are those of Whites. This perspective is, of course, integral, however the

12 Note that some of the researchers conducting these studies are not white, and to that extent may bring non-white insights to bear on the study. However, my contention is that their work still largely focuses on those identifying as white, and does not explicitly incorporate non-white perspectives through the studies’ participants, nor do they raise the significance of the race of the researcher.
absence of Black participants in these studies is conspicuous and unfortunate. Taken together, through these omissions, this body of work implies that the domain of Critical Whiteness Studies entails the contemplation by Whites of white identities more so than the contemplation of the system of whiteness where nonwhite perspectives might be particularly informative\(^\text{13}\), as I have argued above.

It is also salient to note how the field of inquiry is handled in some of these studies. Some (Jackson & Heckman, 2002; Lawrence, 1997; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Marx & Pennington, 2003) involve only white participants, whether by design or circumstance. However, other studies (Aveling, 2004a; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Gillespie et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 2005), though they acknowledge the presence of Nonwhite participants, albeit in small numbers, among the student and teacher groups they investigate, ultimately elide the presence and voices of the Nonwhites who are a part of the pool of participants. Thus, while I acknowledge that the researchers’ decisions to limit their focus to the Whites in the study may be a deliberate attempt to manage the complexity of their studies, I suggest, that they need to be balanced by studies centering nonwhite perspectives on whiteness.

There are a few studies (Nicoll, 2004; Goldstein, 2001; Rich & Cargile, 2004; Williams Chizhik & Williams Chizhik, 2005) that do pay some attention to the presence, however small, of Nonwhites among their research participants. For example, Goldstein, 2001, mentions the differential responses by Black and white students when she asked her students to segregate into race-based groups for class discussion. However, as we will see also happens in those studies about Whites claiming antiracism or who are

---

\(^{13}\) I do not intend to suggest here that Black perspectives are inherently more insightful or critical than white perspectives—particularly if the Blacks involved are not actively involved in antiracism work. However, I do insist upon the salience of these perspectives nevertheless.
directly involved in racial equity work (Section 1.3.6), these articles do not fully explore
the meanings of these racial positionalities and multiple perspectives to the actual task of
doing antiracism work. Thus, though they include nonwhite voices in their analyses,
these voices are not central to the analyses. Space is therefore created for a study that (re)
centers the nonwhite voice in an analysis of whiteness.

1.3.6 Empirical Works on Whiteness: Whites Claiming Antiracism or involved in
Racial Equity Work

The studies I have considered thus far have had as participants those Whites who
claim egalitarianism, but not necessarily antiracism. However, studies specifically about
Whites who do claim antiracism or who participate in racial equity work, in general,
continue the trends I have identified so far with respect to inclusion of the
Black/nonwhite voice. I describe some of these studies and identify the ways that the
trends for the studies about egalitarian Whites are continued.

Johnson’s (2002) study uses a narrative analysis to investigate the lives of six
teachers who were identified by a racially diverse group of racial equity workers as
having an awareness of racism. The life stories of these educators revealed that their
journey to consciousness was facilitated by family and other equal-status relationships
with people of Colour, by their own marginalization on the basis of other axes of
inequity, and/or by religious or ideological commitments to social justice.

Chubbuck (2004) examines the lives of two teachers, this time nominated by
Blacks as effective teachers of Black students and activists against racism in education.
Chubbuck examines the congruency and contradiction of these teachers’ practice with
their stated antiracist commitments. She found that these teachers strongly articulated an antiracist position and took some steps to oppose the racial inequity that their students faced. Nevertheless, they took some stances that were rooted in whiteness, and failed to see how some of the approaches they used enabled the continuance of an inequitable status quo, such as commitment to a problematic tracking system, or being sympathetic to students’ challenges without supporting their academic achievement (p. 328). Chubbuck’s work argues that philosophical commitment to either the notion of the abolition of whiteness or the notion of the rearticulation of whiteness (as proposed by Critical Whiteness Studies) are insufficient for disrupting whiteness and preventing these white racial equity workers from enacting whiteness. Indeed, these contradictory outcomes expose the folly of both the abolitionist position (in that they could not recognize the whiteness they hoped to abolish) and the rearticulation position (in that knowledge about whiteness proved insufficient to challenge whiteness) (see p. 329). Chubbuck argues that in addition to commitments to these positions, we may need to examine micro-level psychological phenomena to arrive at a better understanding of the pitfalls for white antiracists in their attempts to disrupt whiteness, and a better understanding of how to avoid them.

Note that the studies mentioned above identify the white antiracist participants by means of consultation with Nonwhites. That is, Nonwhites were asked to nominate Whites they felt were antiracist and who could be participants for these studies. This methodology is one way of addressing the issue of the inclusion of the nonwhite voice by naming Whites as antiracist only if they are so seen by the Nonwhites that work with them. Yet these studies do not focus upon nonwhite voices and nonwhite perspectives
about the white colleagues. It is also interesting to note that both studies identify problems with this methodology. Both Johnson and Chubbuck confess that the nomination process turned up few nominees (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 312; Johnson, 2002, p. 156) and Chubbuck admits that initially no individual received more than one nomination (p. 312). This difficulty seems to suggest a possible incongruence between the researchers’ and the nonwhite communities’ definitions and understandings of what a white antiracist is. This may have been the single most important insight to be gleaned from this inclusion of nonwhite voices. Unfortunately, this potentially rich area of exploration is not attended to in either of these studies.

Other studies identify the white antiracist for their studies by means of their antiracist action—often their participation in antiracist organizations (Eichstedt, 2001; Fishman & McCarthy, 2005; Manglitz et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2000, 2001, 2003; Thompson, 2001). Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2005) investigate the resistance strategies of white antiracist adult educators. Their study identifies the need for these white educators to examine their privilege, stay in touch with Nonwhites, and to understand how to claim both racist and antiracist identities. This stance allows them to simultaneously remain accountable for whiteness in an inequitable racial system that privileges their bodies regardless of their political intentions, while living out white identities that oppose this inequity.

Eichstedt (2001), studies the way that the antiracist Whites in her study navigate between what she terms a “static construction of white racism” that positions Whites as always racist with a “problematic identity” (p. 445), and their own sense of themselves as antiracist activists. Eichstedt’s findings are similar to those of Johnson (2002) in terms of
the conditions that help to produce a white identity that actively opposes racism. She also discovers that these white antiracists all claim the “static” white identity as a way to hold themselves accountable in a racially inequitable society, while seeking ultimately to deconstruct whiteness (much as the participants in Manglitz et. al., 2005). What is interesting, however, is what seems to be Eichstedt’s own sense of discomfort with the extent to which her participants hold to the notion that they are positioned as racists (see p. 459). She feels that her participants’ position is one that will discourage other Whites from becoming involved in opposing racism. She holds this position despite the fact that her participants have quite a different explanation for other Whites’ resistance to challenging racism. Eichstedt attributes this resistance to essentialized understandings of white identity as negative, while her participants attribute it, not to the faulty understanding of whiteness, but rather to an accurate understanding of whiteness and the privilege it affords, alongside a reluctance to relinquish that privilege (p. 466, footnote). Eichstedt therefore undermines her participants’ nuanced understandings of whiteness and white identity that are grounded in their experience as white antiracism activists and their experience working alongside Black antiracists.

Fishman and McCarthy’s (2005) article describes a study of their own pedagogical practices as they attempted to respond to Critical Race Theorists and integrate a critique of whiteness into their class sessions, though they had no formal academic training in Critical Race or antiracism theories. Their analysis points to their own inability to interrogate their own whiteness, and their lack of an adequate understanding of race and racism as articulated by Black theorists. The study also points over and over to the responses and reactions provoked from Black students in their
classes as they attempted this racial experiment, and much of the article seems to be a voyeuristic display of the Black participants’ negative reactions that the authors are trying to understand. However, the researchers’ good intentions were not enough to achieve antiracist ends. I would argue that the study also points to the arrogance involved in the researchers’ thinking they could do this work within an academic climate without the requisite theoretical/academic background, assuming that their good intentions were sufficient. I am also led to ask whether the Blacks spoken of in the study were well served by the study. What did it mean that they bore the brunt of the researchers’ bungled efforts? What are the consequences of the fact that the researchers turned a blind eye to these Black students’ reactions, and the angry exchanges that ensued, because of their own discomfort (p. 352)? How are the students, and Blacks in general, affected by this incomplete and amateurish dealing—both during the study and in the writing of the article—with the issues and reactions that their study design raised?

Thus, of the studies above, some again do not contain the nonwhite voice, some elide the nonwhite voice, and some include it as spectacle rather than respectfully. Further, it is clear that the overriding concern of the existing literature is the process by which Whites come to critical consciousness about racial inequity, and having come to that consciousness, how they maintain it. The existing work is also preoccupied with establishing Whites’ place in racial equity work. While these matters are important, I suggest that these might not be the questions that most interest Nonwhites, who may have additional concerns about the meaning and impact of white involvement in the racial equity work which is, after all, ultimately a struggle for nonwhite liberation, agency, and self-definition.
Two studies that do not fit this profile are worth mentioning here. O’Brien’s (2003) work argues that the thirty white antiracists in her study enact whiteness despite their commitments to racial equity. They often adopt paternalistic attitudes toward Black antiracists that are lacking in empathy, and that do not comprehend the considerable risks for the Black body involved in racial equity work. They also separate themselves from other Whites, setting up “good white/bad white” dichotomies (p. 267). O’Brien argues that both of these problems are rooted in Whites’ immersion in dominant liberal individualistic modes of thinking that do not take sufficient account of group racial identity, particularly as it applies to themselves. This somewhat more nuanced study does include Black voices and critiques of the behaviour and politics of white racial equity workers, and is one important point of departure for the present study which will deepen and extend these insights.

Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo, and Scully’s (2003) study is a multilayered analysis of women’s means of challenging gender and racial inequity where they work. They discover that Black women seem to be more overt in their opposition to inequity, even as they temper their responses in order to keep their jobs. The white women seem to be a lot less so. The interracial struggle that this research team of two Black and two white scholars experiences as they attempt to interpret the data and decide whose interpretations of white women’s silence are legitimate, adds another dimension to the study and gives insight into the nature of the relationships and issues within these kinds of interracial collaborative projects. This study also provides another point of departure for the present study, raising questions about what respectful collaborations between Blacks and Whites
in racial equity work might look like, and about how Blacks might resist whiteness as it manifests within these collaborations.

Thus, this literature review has mapped out the space for a study about white racial equity work that centers the voices and perspectives of Blacks and promises to round out the perspectives in the existing literature. For example, many of the studies emphasize the significance of Whites’ experiences of marginalization along with some other axis of social identity other than race (whether gender, class, disability, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality) in bringing them to racial equity work. What, however, might Blacks’ impressions be about this phenomenon and the way it is deployed? Further, if understanding racism as structural is important for white racial equity workers, and if it is important for them to balance the notion of being fully a part of the dominant group while trying to challenge racism and identify as antiracists, what epistemological and pedagogical processes might be involved in achieving this, and what do these processes imply for Blacks and Black resistance of whiteness?

What is also of marked importance with respect to this literature review is that these studies suggest that the white antiracist identity is contradictory and conflicted (Chubbuck, 2004; Eichstedt, 2001; Manglitz et al., 2005). They also find that white antiracism is dependent upon nonwhite identities and Black antiracism. For example, O’Brien (2001), Thompson (2001), Chubbuck (2004), and Johnson (2002) suggest that contact and interaction with Nonwhites is crucial to the development of a white antiracist identity. Certainly Fishman and McCarthy’s missteps might have been avoided if they had entertained these kinds of relationships. Chubbuck (2004, p. 330) and O’Brien (2003, p. 260) propose that white antiracists also need to maintain relationship to
Nonwhites who will hold them accountable. Thompson (2001, p. 35) even suggests that white antiracist organizations that do not maintain relationship with Black antiracists quickly lose their antiracist focus (which agrees somewhat with what I have argued has happened in Critical Whiteness Studies). Finally, Thompson (2001, p. 83), Eichstedt (2001, pp. 448-449 footnote), and Manglitz et. al. (2005, p. 1267) suggest that it is difficult, and even antithetical, for white antiracists to do any antiracist strategizing and planning without the input and direction of nonwhite antiracists. What, then, might be the terms upon which these kinds of collaborations may occur, and what terms might their Black colleagues propose? For example, some studies demonstrate that the development of a white antiracist identity is a process, and that during this process white antiracists-in-the-making (naively) commit racist acts. They further suggest that Whites should be immersed among Blacks with a view to those Blacks’ supporting and assisting their antiracist development (e.g. Johnson, 2002, p. 164) and/or that they should continue to flounder as they learn how to do antiracism adeptly and respectfully (e.g. Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). In light of these claims, what might the Blacks among whom they are immersed, or who are victims of the racism they perpetrate while they are developing as antiracists, say about this? Under what circumstances, if any, are they willing to serve in this capacity? What are the limits to this willingness? What are the benefits to Blacks of these arrangements? What are the hazards? Keeping the Bell et. al. (2003) study in mind, how are these relationships negotiated when there is conflict? How might Blacks prevent, negotiate, and/or resist the hazards of these collaborations? This study aspires toward answering some of these questions.
1.4 Significance of the Study, and Research and Learning Objectives

I am, therefore, brought to this study by the points I raise above in the introduction, the personal experiences I have shared, and the matters I have raised about the shortcomings and gaps in the existing literature. This study is a response to the paradoxical manifestation of whiteness in spaces that exist ostensibly to promote racial equity. It is a decisive project that insists upon the critical importance of Black perspectives in these spaces. It centers the Black voice, and seeks to re-center its insights and perspectives around white antiracism. It also seeks to provide a response to Dei’s (1999) concern about “the call for a transracial coalition praxis devoid of any symptoms of politics of identity” (p. 17).

In this study, I gather and explore the insights that a sample of Black racial equity workers has about the work and identities of the white racial equity workers with whom they collaborate in racial equity work. Clearly, there are forms of racial equity done by Whites about which Blacks feel positively, and racial equity collaborations between Blacks and Whites that Blacks feel work well; likewise, there is some of this work and there are some of these collaborations that Blacks resent and resist. How do the Black racial equity workers make these distinctions? What do respectful collaborations look like? When are they effective? What are the terms that Black racial equity workers might propose for these kinds of Black-white collaborations for racial equity work, and under what conditions?

This research seeks to contribute to the existing Black critical discourse on whiteness, and in particular to extend this discourse into the space of racial equity collaborations. As such, I restate the learning objectives for this study here:
a) To reinsert, and reassert the importance of, Black perspectives in/to theoretical discussions about white dominance and how it might be challenged.

b) To generate (local and context-specific) grounded theory about how racial location shapes the context of racial equity work and collaborations

c) To develop an ontology of whiteness in the context of racial equity collaborations, and to complicate the theoretical understanding of antiracist white identity,

and

d) To explore the ways in which Black racial equity workers resist whiteness and establish their agency as necessary within these contexts.

Questions used as research objectives that will facilitate the achievement of the learning objectives are:

a) How is racial embodiment related to the production and acquisition of antiracism knowledge for racial equity work?

b) What do the Black racial equity workers feel their white colleagues should know, and how can they learn it?

c) What, from their perspective, are the advantages and disadvantages of having white bodies involved racial equity work?

d) What terms might Black racial equity workers propose for their collaborative work with Whites, and what kinds of approaches do the Black racial equity workers feel make their white colleagues most effective?
e)  (How) do Black racial equity workers assert and maintain Black agency in their collaborative work with Whites?

f)  What risks for Blacks might be inherent in these racial equity collaborations, and how do the Black racial equity workers navigate them?

This study will address the above questions from a Canadian perspective, adding generally to the sparse literature investigating white racial equity workers from the perspective of their Black colleagues, and specifically to the as yet non-existent literature on this topic in Canada.
CHAPTER 2

DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORKS: THEORETICAL TOOLS FOR THINKING
AND MAKING MEANING

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical matters that frame this research project. I discuss the discursive frameworks which will be used as the structure within which to discuss the methods used in the study.

2.2 What is a Discursive Framework, and Why Use It?

Many traditional academic studies would, in this chapter, work with the notion of a theoretical framework. In social science work, a theoretical framework is most often understood as a very particular set of postulates, a grand narrative, about how the social world, or a particular aspect of it, works. A theoretical framework describes a particular interrelationship between the concepts considered salient within the aspect of the social world a study addresses.

Where a theoretical framework is used to structure a research project, it is usually done either with the intent of applying the theory in a new situation, or in an as yet uninvestigated subset of the domain to which the theory is thought to apply. Therefore, the theoretical framework will generally prescribe the questions that may be asked, and these questions are normally hypotheses concerned with determining whether the theory has explanatory power for the new situation to which it is being applied. In turn, the data collected in the course of such a study is examined to determine how well it fits the theory. The study therefore either verifies the theory, or suggests the inapplicability of the theory to the particular situation under investigation. Where the data does fit the
situation under investigation, there are some fortuitous occasions when the study may elaborate the theory rather than simply validating it. In general, however, a theoretical framework is quite prescriptive, directs the research, and is expected to frame the research data rather than allow the research data to turn up new meanings and understandings. It often betrays a commitment to a more positivistic approach to social science research, which is invested in grand narratives that often underestimate the complexities of human existence. As a result, there are often as many studies that challenge a particular theoretical framework as there are that support it.

In empirical work that considers social identity and difference, a major criticism of many of the meta-narratives that purport to describe various aspects of human existence is that they do not attend to social difference, but rather tend to universalize that which is, in actual fact, particular to select aspects of human experience—most often that of white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual males. Many critical researchers have taken strong instruction, not only from the totalizing tendencies of these meta-narratives and the research that generates and employs them, but also from the dire negative consequences, both historically and in the present, for those bodies marginalized by them (see Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Consequently, many critical researchers investigating social identity and/or acknowledging the significance of social identities in social situations resist meta-narratives, preferring to engage in research that respects the salience of the local and the particular.

With the aforementioned concerns in mind, in this study I seek to avoid the pitfalls of the theoretical framework and opt, instead, for the discursive framework, which is in some respects similar to what some researchers (e.g. Maxwell, 1998) refer to
as a conceptual framework. The discursive framework, as its name implies, suggests a network of broadly defined key concepts within which a particular phenomenon may be contemplated. However, in terms of a particular research project, it does not prescribe how the research data must be understood. Rather, the discursive framework is open and flexible enough to allow the research project to propose new relationships among its salient concepts, and to accommodate new perspectives about the domain of inquiry (see Zine, 2004, pp. 64-65).

As I will discuss thoroughly in the following chapter, in this study I use a Grounded Theory methodology in which theory is generated from the data rather than attempting to fit the data into an existing theory. It is important to clarify that by using a discursive framework, I do not contradict the goals of a Grounded Theory approach. First, the discursive framework only sets the broad discursive parameters within which the study will be carried out. For example, in this study the discursive frameworks I use will not entertain debate about the existence of racism, white racial dominance, or the Eurocentric nature of “Western” societies, and will recognize the multiple identities within a racial group, and the salience of resistance to racial oppression. However, within these limits, they will not drive the analysis of the data. Second, the study proposes local and specific theory directly related to its area of interest—that is, collaborations between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work. Theory thus generated is not intended to be a grand narrative and can certainly be in harmony with the broader discursive parameters described in this chapter.

Perhaps one of the most important features of a discursive framework as I conceptualize it is that, through its articulation of the key concepts, the discursive
framework also outlines the political and ideological commitments within which the research will be located (see Dei, 2000c, pp. 25-26). This is not to suggest that the discursive framework imposes preconceived outcomes for the research or fosters intellectual dishonesty. On the contrary, its up-front articulation of its political and ideological commitments allows those who consume the research to understand how these commitments impact the research. This contrasts with other forms of research in which the positivist assumption is made that the researcher is assumed not to have political and ideological commitments, or where these are ostensibly bracketed out (either option being, of course, impossible for any human agent). In these cases, political and ideological commitments are obscured within claims to objectivity and neutrality, and so are not made explicit for consideration alongside the research and its outcomes.

The conception of the discursive framework as I describe it here also allows for the weaving together of more than one framework. A theoretical framework normally prescribes a particular understanding of the domain of inquiry, and a particular relationship between key concepts. It is therefore almost impossible to simultaneously employ more than one theory at the same level of abstraction in any coherent manner. This is not the case with discursive frameworks. Arising from their caution about grand narratives, and their respect for the complexity of human existence, discursive frameworks can often be juxtaposed in order to allow for more profound and multifaceted understandings of the domain of inquiry.

This study will engage an eclectic discursive framework achieved by a weaving together of a number of discursive approaches, namely Critical Integrative Antiracism, Afrocentricity, and Critical Whiteness Studies. In the following sections, I describe the
salient features of these frameworks, particularly as they relate to this study. I then go on to explain why none of these frameworks would be adequate on its own.

2.3 Critical Integrative Antiracism

The Critical Integrative Antiracism discursive framework is important in this study because it provides the discursive parameters within which to take up the concepts of race and racism, which are clearly central to this study that investigates the dynamics in collaborative work between Black and white racial equity workers.

Critical Integrative Antiracism, particularly as elaborated by George Dei (1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2000a, 2000c; 2005), notes that race is not synonymous with culture or ethnicity. Where race is understood as culture and ethnicity, racial inequity is seen as arising benignly from incompatibility of cultures, or at most, xenophobia. This understanding tends to understand racial groups as having certain essential characteristics, renders racialized groups as monolithic, and tends to flatten out the diversity within racialized groups. More importantly, where race is understood as culture or ethnicity, it fails to grasp the socially constructed nature of race—the ways that human action creates these constructions in order to generate and justify social inequality.

Therefore, Critical Integrative Antiracism focuses our attention on the ways that racial inequity is produced and reproduced through societal structures (Dei, 1996a, 1996b, p. 253; Essed, 1991, p. vii). Critical Integrative Antiracism insists that the phenomenon of racism is a structural one more so than an individual one. Thus, it is not solely or even primarily occupied with the notions of individual prejudice and bigotry,

\[14\] An earlier version of this section appears in Howard, 2004 (pp. 65-66).
debates about intentions, and questions about “why can’t we all get along?” which are the main concern of mainstream race relations discourses. Rather, Critical Integrative Antiracism underscores the need to go beyond celebrating diversity to interrogate inequitable distributions of power and privilege (Dei, 1995, p. 252; 2000c, p. 28) based to some extent upon physical characteristics and cultural norms, but also and more importantly through flexible social, legal, and discursive processes and practices of racialization (see Goldberg, 1993; Lopez, 1994, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1986). Critical Integrative Antiracism also interrogates the normalization and justification of the terms and conditions of inequity whereby racial inequity becomes business as usual (Essed, 1991; Okolie, 2005, p. 248). Antiracism discourse holds that the notions of race and racialization, as well as the power dynamics associated with them, are crucial to understanding how contemporary societies function (Thompson, 1997)—particularly in European and Euro-North American societies, and in international and transnational contexts where Euro-American dominance increasingly imposes itself through globalization(s).

However, in acknowledging the importance of the concept of race to an understanding of social dynamics, Critical Integrative Antiracism does not reify the notion of race nor does it reinforce or essentialize it (Dei, 1996b, 2006a). It understands that race is a social construction, yet resists the kind of understanding of the term social construction that would suggest that social constructions are of no consequence (Omi & Winant, 1986, 1993). Omi and Winant make the assertion that though race is no longer widely thought of as an essential biological characteristic, it cannot be dismissed as imaginary, nor can it be deemed “a kind of false consciousness” (p. 5) that is more
accurately understood as determined by other social relations (such as class relations). Race is an important analytical concept in its own right, for the concept race, in and of itself, though a construct of shifting meaning(s), has been quite consistently relevant in producing distinct advantages for some, and very real punitive consequences for others (Dei, 2000c, p. 27).

At the same time, while insisting on the importance of race as an axis of oppression, Critical Integrative Antiracism, in its anti-essentialism, also understands that racial oppression is crosscut by other axes of oppression such as class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and dis/ability. Antiracism therefore recognizes that no particular racial identity is homogeneous or monolithic, and it contemplates the ways in which other axes of oppression interact with race to locate individuals differently and to generate different, yet interrelated, manifestations of racial oppression (Dei, 2000c, pp. 31-33). For example, while there are definite commonalities in the ways that Blacks experience oppression, the nature of that experience also differs in important ways based on the permutations of gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, disability and other social identities.

Critical Integrative Antiracism, however, asserts that in spite of this complexity, race must remain central in discussions about racial oppression so that it is not sidelined amid the discussion of other oppressions—particularly within a climate that so readily denies race and racism (Dei, 2000c, p. 30; Okolie, 2005, p. 249). Thus, Critical Integrative Antiracism asserts the “salience” (Dei, 1999, p. 28; 2000a; 2000c, pp. 30-31) of race.
The salience of race also has fundamental implications for knowledge claims and knowledge production. A critical antiracist framework asserts the ability of the racially oppressed to theorize their lives, and regards this perspective as integral to a comprehensive understanding of race and racism (Dei, 1999, p. 31; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300; Delpit, 1988, p. 297; Narayan, 1989). In this regard, it is not considered a source of bias or a blind-spot where researchers share racial identification with the participants of their research. Indeed, while such an arrangement should not be taken to guarantee access to infallible ‘truth’, it is extremely likely to produce perspectives and insights that would not otherwise have been generated and which must become a part of the conversation (see, e.g. Hendrix, 2002).

The features of the Critical Integrative Antiracism discursive framework discussed above—the salience of race, its interaction with other axes of oppression, and its relation to knowledge production—allow the researcher to invoke the notion of community without implying a singular Black perspective. Therefore, with respect to this study that seeks to flesh out a Black perspective upon the Black-white relationships in collaborative racial equity work, the Critical Integrative Antiracism discursive framework informs the study by complicating mainstream discourses of race, and drawing attention to the critical salience of a particular community-based Black voice (among many possible ones) without undermining either its complexity, or the potential effects of contextual power dynamics in shaping or contaminating this voice (Dei, 2000c, p. 37; Okolie, 2005, p. 257).
2.4 Afrocentricity\(^{15}\)

Afrocentricity, as advanced largely by Molefi Asante (1980, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1998, 1999, 2003), draws attention to the way that cultural paradigms shape knowledge. In a similar manner to the way that Critical Integrative Antiracism recognizes diversity within community, Afrocentricity insists upon the continuity of the cultures of African peoples wherever they are found, positing that while there is fluidity within an African worldview, the cultures of people of African ancestry the world over bear more similarity to each other than they do to European or other non-African cultures (see, e.g., Asante, 1999; 2003, p. 45; see also Dei, 1994).

This view is an extension of the understanding of the relationship between individual and community that characterizes African diasporic communities. African-centered worldviews understand all elements of the universe as being connected and interdependent (Schiele, 1994, p. 152). An African-centered worldview asserts that “the concept of individual makes sense only within the concept of community” (Dei, 1994, p. 12, emphasis in the original), and that “the individual cannot be understood separate from other people” (Schiele, 1994, p. 154). This is not to suggest that individual identity is invalidated within African-centered perspectives, but rather to suggest that the individual achieves her/his fullest potential in the context of the community. Dei asserts, “the dichotomy is not between the individual and community, but between the competitive individual isolated from his or her community and the cooperative individual enriched by the community” (Dei, 1994, p. 12, emphasis in the original).\(^{16}\)

---

\(^{15}\) This section includes modified excerpts from Howard, 2008 (pp. 30-32).

\(^{16}\) The assertion of the importance of community in African worldviews and cultures is not to be taken to suggest that the notion of community is unique to Africans. However, it gestures to the particular ways in which this is understood and deployed in African diasporic contexts.
A key concept in the Afrocentric framework is the notion of centeredness (Asante, 1987; 1991, p. 171). It establishes the salience of culture in providing multiple ways of knowing the world (Asante, 2003, p. 38; Morikawa, 2001, pp. 433-434.). The Afrocentric framework posits that we all are centered in some cultural perspective whether we acknowledge this or not (Asante, 1991, p. 171), and it recognizes the individual and group right to be culturally centered in this manner. Further, it emphasizes the importance for social well-being of being grounded in one’s own cultural heritage (Asante, 1991, p. 171). Indeed, Afrocentricity is defined as “the conscious process by which a person locates or relocates African phenomena within an African subject content or agency and action” (Asante, 2002, p. 97).

Afrocentricity repudiates the advancement of any cultural perspective as somehow universally applicable or as superior to other cultural perspectives (Asante, 1991, p. 172; 2003, p. 45). Specifically, Afrocentricity posits that Eurocentric epistemologies, axiologies, aesthetics, and so on—posing as neutral, uninterested, normal, and universal—undergird much of what “we” know in “Western” society and hence, have often framed the ways “we” think, act, evaluate, and feel (Mazama, 2001, p. 387). Afrocentricity asserts that one of the primary foundations for the racial oppression of people of African ancestry is through forcing them/us to be defined and to operate within the terms of Eurocentricity. People of African ancestry become implicated in

---

17 Though, as I have previously stated, this study uses the terms Black, African, and of African ancestry interchangeably, here, in the discussion of the Afrocentric paradigm, I use the terms African and people of African ancestry as the terms most congruent with Afrocentric discourse (which, incidentally, are the terms that I prefer).

18 The concepts Afrocentricity and Eurocentricity, understood as they have been practiced historically, are therefore not analogous concepts (Asante, 1991, pp. 171-172). For while the Afrocentric framework is up front about being a culturally grounded perspective that intentionally centers the worldviews of African people with a view to resisting cultural domination, Eurocentricity seldom, if ever, names itself. Rather, it
our oppression wherever we uncritically accept the prescriptions of Eurocentricity, or define ourselves in simplistic opposition to it (Akbar, 2003, p. 133). Therefore, the liberation of African peoples depends upon Africans being African-centered—that is, conceptualizing ourselves and our world on those core African cultural terms shared by African cultures (Dei, 1999, p. 2).

By laying bare the notion of centricity, an Afrocentric framework serves to distinguish between those academic endeavours that contribute to Black liberation, and those which remain trapped within the systems that dominate us (Asante, 1999, p. 108; Christian, 2001, pp. 18-19). Indeed, Afrocentricity makes a crucial distinction between work that professes to be Black/African studies but does not center African agency, and that work which does center African agency. The former it considers “nothing but European studies of Africa” (Mazama, 2001, p. 395) and African peoples. Afrocentrists assert that in order to be truly considered Black Studies, any study of Blacks must be approached Afrocentrically—that is, from a position that centers the agency and interests of African peoples (Asante, 2003, p. 49; Kershaw, 1992, p. 167; Mazama, 2001, p. 396). These ideas are critical in this study which investigates Blacks and Whites collaborating in racial equity projects which are ostensibly for Black liberation. The Afrocentric framework opens up the space to consider convergence and divergence between how the Blacks and Whites involved understand the ends of this work, and also to consider how different Black participants may, themselves, be differently centered and to varying degrees adopt Eurocentric stances that marginalize their own experience.

conceals its self-interestedness, suggesting that it is in the interest of all (Akbar, 2003, pp. 134-135; Asante, 2003, p. 143).
Of particular import to this study is the way that the Afrocentric framework works with the notion of agency. In sociological contexts, agency is understood as the individual’s ability to make decisions and to act independently of the social structures within which s/he is located. However, in Afrocentricity, this concept is raised to the level of the group. Thus, agency within the Afrocentric framework refers to Africans’ ability and prerogative to interpret our worlds and to act in ways that are consistent with an African worldview rather than upon the terms of a structurally-imposed Eurocentric one (Asante, 1998; Lundy, 2003, p. 464), to evaluate matters in terms of the interests of African people (Kershaw, 1992, p. 163), and to choose the terms of our alliance with other groups (Asante, 1999, p. 108). In this manner, Afrocentricity underscores the right of Africans to be subjects rather than objects in the stories of our own lives (Asante, 2003, p. 38), and to reject the marginal status afforded us in histories and narratives created by others about us (Mazama, 2001, p. 387). Afrocentricity therefore also informs the present study by providing a framework within which to think about white racial equity work and racial equity collaborations through an analysis of their relationship to the agency of Africans. It also provides the rationale for investigating and understanding the terms which Black racial equity workers might set for their engagement with white racial equity workers and efforts in order to assert their agency.

2.5 Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS)

I cautiously engage with the domain known since the 1980s and 1990s as Critical Whiteness Studies. The literature review in Chapter 1 has already presented an extensive discussion of Critical Whiteness Studies and its three projects, so the discussion here will draw out the concepts I find salient to this project, while distancing myself from those
aspects of it that would be counterproductive. I engage with this domain within fairly strict parameters because of the ongoing debate about the reasons for the emergence of this discourse in this particular historical moment, and the interrogation of the way that the discourse is deployed by some white scholars (see, e.g., Andersen, 2003; Karenga, 1999). However, I seek to identify with and extend the insights of the critical Black scholars who pioneered the critical gaze upon whiteness that can inform this project in important ways.

First, the study of race and racism has often short-sightedly occupied itself only with the oppressed and their oppression without also critically considering the resulting benefits and privilege that accrue to the racially dominant. However, Black scholars have long pointed to the need to critically examine racial dominance as an integral part of challenging racial inequity in Euro-American societies (e.g. Baldwin, 1966, 1984; Bennett, 1966; Clark, 1966; Du Bois, 1921; Harris, 1993; Lomax, 1966; Morrison, 1992). The Critical Whiteness framework work carries over the antiracist understanding of race as a social construction to define whiteness as a socially constructed dominant racial location. The early first project sociological and historical works of Critical Whiteness Studies theorize the social processes by which diverse European ethnicities were minimized, often through establishing their difference and distance from Blackness, in order to acquire and consolidate white racial privilege (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1991). Thus, at least this early Critical Whiteness work differentiates between “the concept ‘white identity/white ethnicity’ as the multiple and varied ways white individuals (choose to) inhabit their bodies in the world, and the concept

---

19 Yet other Critical Whiteness work challenges the notion that the whiteness of white European immigrants was ever in question even though they were racialized and mistreated (Guglielmo, 2003).
‘whiteness’, which refers to the system of domination that confers privilege upon white bodies at the expense of the racially oppressed” (Howard, 2004, p. 74). It points out the importance of not rendering the experience of racial oppression as equivalent to the way white ethnicity is lived (Sleeter, 1993).

The critical examination of whiteness therefore involves understanding how white individuals come to know themselves as white and therefore racially dominant (e.g. Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Moon, 1999) and how this whiteness is produced and reproduced through cultural and legal/state apparatuses (Dyer, 1997; Harris, 1993; Morrison, 1992). However, the utility of Critical Whiteness Studies in challenging racial oppression depends upon its remaining the contemplation of whiteness as a structural phenomenon conferring dominance upon certain bodies. It must also maintain a steadfast objective of eradicating racial dominance without deteriorating, as it sometimes does (see, e.g., Hartigan, 1997, 2003; Wray & Newitz, 1997), into a celebratory fascination with white identities without appropriate analysis of how the whiteness of these identities is implicated in racial inequity. This, then, is one limit I impose upon my engagement with Critical Whiteness as a discursive framework.

This examination of whiteness has become increasingly relevant as the nature of white supremacy has come to include contemporary colour-blind manifestations (Bonilla-Silva, 2003a, 2003b; Carr, 1997; Crenshaw, 1997b). The Critical Whiteness framework therefore also interrogates the unmarkedness of whiteness (Chambers, 1997; Dyer, 1997; McIntosh, 1990) that normalizes racial inequity and allows it to seem unremarkable to those privileged by race, even as they often claim to value racial egalitarianism. This inability of many who are racially dominant to recognize and challenge their white-skin
privilege and to understand its relationship to the oppression of Nonwhites is of great relevance in this study that investigates the involvement of Whites in racial equity work.

However, though white scholars have claimed that the invisibility of whiteness is universal, Black scholars have pointed out that whiteness cannot be assumed to be invisible or normal to Nonwhites (se, e.g., Ahmed, 2004, para 1; hooks, 1992b). Indeed, this example of disjuncture between Black and white scholars’ theorizing illustrates why I proceed with caution as I engage with the Critical Whiteness framework, and seek to restore to it the critical insights of the Black scholars who pioneered it. The Afrocentric framework and its focus upon the notion of group-based agency helps us to understand why the Critical Whiteness framework as it is currently deployed by many white scholars is inadequate on its own for understanding relationships between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work. Its (often unconscious) centering of white agency results in its becoming caught up within Eurocentric conceptualizations and white interests, and therefore, through the lens of Afrocentricity, has become unable to rupture the white racial dominance which grows out of the same conceptualizations. These contradictions, then, undermine the critical potential of Critical Whiteness Studies in its present manifestation.

In this light, it is crucial that I note here, that the writings in Critical Whiteness Studies that center on notions of the abolition (e.g., Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Roediger, 1994) or the rearticulation (e.g. Giroux, 1997a, 1997b; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, 2000; Rodriguez, 1998) of white identities are extremely problematic, and my theoretical engagement with Critical Integrative Antiracism and Afrocentricity cause me to be extremely critical of this body of work, particularly because it sidesteps the salience of
the white body in white supremacist society and within antiracist work. However, a more recent trajectory of writings in Critical Whiteness Studies (or antiracist writing on whiteness) attends to the tenuous and contradictory nature of the white antiracist identity (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2004; Scheurich, 2002; Thompson, 2003) in a manner that is more congruent with my understanding of white antiracism and, more importantly, with early Black critiques of whiteness (e.g. Baldwin, 1984). This observation, of course, has serious implications for the field of Critical Whiteness Studies itself as it is practiced by many white individuals, and it is in these interstices that room is made for the critical input of Nonwhites. This study, then, works with this gap to maintain a critical gaze upon dominance that is informed by Blacks’ meanings, and that seeks to add to the body of such insights. In that Critical Whiteness Studies has its roots in Black academic analyses makes this project, in some respects, a project of reclamation.

It is probably important to address what may seem to be the conspicuous lack of Critical Race Theory from the discussion of discursive frameworks here. This lack is in some ways only apparent, as the tenets and approaches of the frameworks discussed above overlap significantly with those of Critical Race Theory. The most significant distinction between these frameworks is probably that of the academic domain within which they originated. Thus, while Afrocentricity arose in the context of Black Studies, and Critical Integrative Antiracism in the domain of Education, Critical Race Theory had its beginning in the domain of Law and Legal Studies (see Aylward, 1999, p. 26), and so carries a particular theoretical bent and focus that is not always immediately or easily transferred to other domains of inquiry. The transferability of the ideas in each of these domains needs to be established on the basis of the connections between these academic
domains—which are, nevertheless, quite easy to argue (see Ladson-Billings, 1998). Further, I note that the similarity between the terms Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies is not coincidental, and CWS draws many of its insights about the normalizing of whiteness from CRT’s analysis of the whiteness that underlies the practical application of the assertion that justice should be “blind.”

2.6 “Why all of these?”: Towards a Critical Race Africology of Racial Equity Collaborations

I consider each of these theoretical frameworks to be important for the research project that I propose, while no single one of them is able to stand on its own for the purposes of my project. Critical Integrative Antiracism offers the most nuanced understanding of the concept race and therefore a more comprehensive understanding of racial oppression than is offered by the other frameworks. The Critical Whiteness framework focuses our gaze upon sites of dominance. It examines and interrogates the ways that white subjects are seduced into regarding the terms of white supremacy as normal, and provides the tools to be able to understand the contradictions inherent in a white antiracist identity. The Afrocentric framework offers the concept of group agency. By examining agency at the group level we can distinguish between, and predict the likely outcomes of, projects that appear similar because of the focus of their inquiry, but which may differ fundamentally in terms of where they are rooted. The Afrocentric focus on agency offsets the tendency of Critical Whiteness to co-opt the work of nonwhite (and particularly Black) scholars (Karenga, 1999), and its tendency to re-center the agency and interests of white identities (Howard, 2004).
One potential incompatibility of the frameworks is in the fact that Afrocentricity has warned us of the dangers of becoming entangled in the race construct since it is fundamentally a construct created for our domination\(^\text{20}\), and Afrocentricity itself has focused and rightly so, upon specifically classical African cultural phenomena. On the other hand, Critical Integrative Antiracism and Critical Whiteness warn of the dangers of understanding racial oppression in solely cultural terms (Banton, 1977; Razack, 1995, pp. 60-62, 83-85; Sin, 2006), and focus their attention upon challenging racist social arrangements.

However, it is my opinion that these cautions can both be taken seriously without treating them as oppositional, for an either/or position may lead inadvertently to a failure to grasp the complexity of racial oppression. White racism seldom makes sharp distinctions between the concepts of race and culture. I would argue that, among other matters, it is the continual shifting back and forth between these concepts in mainstream discourse that creates conditions that allow for our continued domination. That is, the constant shifting between the “culturalization of racism” (Razack, 1995, p. 60) and the pejorative “racialization of culture” (Adjei, 2006) allows for the obfuscation of the terms of racial domination, and creates a plethora of racist ideas rooted anywhere in the spectrum between culture and race, unified only by the single purpose of demeaning and oppressing people of Colour. I posit, then, that the solution lies in a both/and approach to culture and race which underscores the connections between raced-based and culture-

\(^{20}\) And by this, I do not refer to those projects that seek to be colour-blind or those that take such a post-modern approach to race that they deny its social significance, and undermine antiracist political mobilizations and efforts to define community. Antiracism and Afrocentricity critique such stances (e.g. Asante, 1999; Dei, 1996, 2006), and I have written in opposition to these stances elsewhere (Howard, 2005, 2006). Instead, I refer here to the important warnings to the racially oppressed to engage in a critical reclamation of our pre-colonial identities rather than limit ourselves to those that have grown out of the conditions of our colonization and oppression.
based paradigms (where culture is not being used to negate race and its socially constructed nature). Consequently, one must be willing to pay attention both to processes of racialization and the ways in which the racially oppressed are not allowed to transcend them, as well as to the immense importance of culture, used judiciously, in establishing a “place to stand” (Asante, 2003a, p. 45) for oppressed people.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I propose just such a synergistic blend of Critical Integrative Antiracism, Afrocentricity, and Critical Whiteness that will combine the power and strengths of these discourses. Specifically, I apply the principles of an Afrocentric analysis around agency, not, in this instance, to African cultural concepts, but rather with respect to race, to look specifically at the contours of whiteness within racial equity endeavours. I advance that since, by definition, racial equity endeavours are concerned with the liberation of those who are racially oppressed, such endeavours must consequently be conceived within a context that promotes the agency and interests of the oppressed, that is, within the climate of an unapologetic antiracist politics (Dei, 1994, p. 17; 2005, p. 12). This blended approach I call a Critical Race Africology. Just as there are ways to study Black people without their agency and interests at the center, and even as these studies do not qualify as Black Studies, so I argue that because of the hegemonic, common-sense nature of white supremacist ideologies, it is quite possible for one to imagine that one is challenging racism without having the interest and agency (and ultimately, the liberation) of the racially oppressed in focus. Thus, the Critical Race Africology lens is particularly well suited to investigating and capturing the subtle

---

21 This term is certainly not meant to suggest that Afrocentric analysis can be applied to racism because it is somehow an African phenomenon. Rather it is meant to signal that Critical Integrative Antiracism, particularly that which challenges anti-Black racism, is part of the Black liberation struggle and ought to be defined with the agency of the racially oppressed at the hub.
nuances of the relationships between Blacks and Whites as they collaborate in racial equity endeavours.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: TOOLS FOR MAKING MEANING

3.1 Methodology and Methods

This chapter turns to the issue of methodology. One of the fundamental expectations/responsibilities when designing any research study is that of making sure that the methods of data collection and analysis align with the theories and hypotheses (if any) of the academic domain in which the research project is embedded. In positivistic research, these matters are addressed by assessing what is called validity, and there is an entire nomenclature to describe the different types of validity that are assessed in this process. In qualitative research, there is an ongoing debate about how similar or dissimilar validity in this kind of research might be to that in positivistic research (see, e.g., Eisner, 1991, pp. 13-14; Eisner, 1993; Lather, 1991; Scheurich, 1997). However, in any study that purports to be critical the challenge is even greater for one must ascertain that the study methodology is not inconsistent with the philosophical and political foundations of the research, which are, themselves, critical of the way that (racial) dominance and exploitation are part of the normalized and accepted ways of doing academic business. The traditionally accepted methods of dominant social research and knowledge production in the “Western” academy have been founded directly upon exploitative social relations—particularly relations of race and colonialism—and have historically been instrumental in furthering these inequities (see, e.g., Gilman, 1992; Huhnsdorf, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Critical researchers cannot conform to these methodologies and must self-consciously carve out critical spaces and ways to carry out their work within the social and academic climates criticized by their work. In this
section, I discuss how I have thought through this endeavour with a view toward ensuring that the project is indeed critical, equitable, and liberatory. I discuss my rationale for using in-depth interviewing for data collection, Grounded Theory as overarching methodology, as well as the ways I have modified the Grounded Theory approach to meet the ethical standards implied by the discursive frameworks within which I locate this study.

It is important for the reader to keep in mind that methodologically this research project has two layers. On one level, I engage the Black research participants in a critical discussion of their collaborations with white colleagues in racial equity work. On this level, I look to the Black participants for information concerning Whites who are not directly a part of this study. On the other level, the Black racial equity workers are themselves the subjects of interest in my study, and as the principal researcher, I gather, analyze, and re-present their narratives. Consequently, some of the discussions below will necessarily address both layers.

Throughout this section, I also aspire toward giving an explicit account of how I, as the researcher, am implicated in the entire process. As I discuss further below, this is an important aspect of qualitative research, and of any critical research methodology which hopes to disrupt canonical knowledge and received norms. It is my opinion that quick, begrudging confessions that simply name researcher identity (race, gender, etc) are inadequate attempts at giving those who consume the research the opportunity to assess how the researcher and her social location has shaped the research process. While it is impossible to ever entirely account for one’s own journey through the research process, I hope that my efforts in this chapter will assist the reader in assessing how I am situated
with respect to the findings of the research that will be presented in ensuing chapters—which are, ultimately, also constructed by me.

3.1.1 Interviewing as Data Collection

Based on Vygotsky’s claim that “every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness,” (cited in Seidman, 1991, p. 1) Seidman argues that “if the interest is in … ‘subjective understanding’ – then it seems … that interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry” (Seidman, 1991, p. 5). His argument is that for human subjects making sense of one’s experiences and constructing narratives about those experiences are mutually constitutive processes (pp. 1-3) and that consequently, in-depth interviewing, in which people are able to narrate their experiences, is the best means of grasping the meaning that humans make (pp. 3-5). I concur with Seidman’s arguments, and take in-depth interviewing to be particularly well suited to the present study.

In this study, my objective, generally stated, is to understand the meaning that Black racial equity workers make of their collaborations with Whites in racial equity work—that is, the meaning they make of these “raced” relationships. Consequently, how they construct narratives about/talk about these relationships and the significance of race within them is the essence that I am trying to distill. Of course, to suggest that I am interested in subjective meaning making is not to suggest that matters of race are imaginary, as some claim (see, e.g., the argument refuted in Omi & Winant, 1993), but rather to draw attention to the importance of experience and the discursive in understanding any social experience. Race and its impacts can be understood in terms of the way they are lived and narrated. Du Bois posited the significance of story and
personal narrative in understanding racial issues claiming, “I seem to see a way of elucidating the inner meaning of life and significance of that race problem by explaining it in terms of the one human life I know best” speaking, of course, of his own life (p. 1). Through interviewing several Black racial equity workers, this research project seeks to bring together several such personal narratives to create an understanding of the impact of whiteness in their lives and work. Though I recognize my own role in interpreting what the participants say and in the selection and presentation of the excerpts from their interviews that I find significant, I believe that interviewing is the only method that offers any hope for us to begin to see what they see and understand how they understand.

I used an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions (See Appendix III). However, participants were allowed to digress as they saw fit and to share whatever they thought might be relevant to the topic, or anything they may have been reminded of by the line of questioning.

I am also committed to the idea that knowledge is socially constructed—that is, to the way that individuals and the social groups of which they are a part construct knowledge dialectically. This is particularly appropriate for people of African ancestry for whom, generally speaking, call-and-response, orality, and oration seem to be significant across the African diaspora; and for the racially oppressed for whom the opportunity to share and narrate their realities among our/themselves is a means of survival within political climates that deny the reality of their experiences of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1994). For this reason, I planned a focus group session that most participants would be able to attend. Unfortunately, however, for logistical and other reasons, as well as the fact that one participant forgot the appointment, the
attendance was much smaller than expected and only two participants ended up attending.

Also based upon my appreciation for the social construction of knowledge and the call-and-response phenomenon, the in-depth interviewing sessions were conversational rather than what, based on my participation in oral cultures, would have been a more sterile question and answer interview. In other words, the research participant and I had a free flowing conversation catalyzed by the interview schedule, and depending upon how the interview was going, I did not feel obligated to ask each participant every question. This conversational style also allowed, where necessary, for the kind of interventive interviewing of which Okolie (2005) writes, whereby participants are encouraged to articulate their responses in relation to the structural relations within which they live (p. 257). As Okolie writes:

… it is problematic to simply stop at asking people what their experiences are or what accounts for them or what they want. We have to theorize with the people and acknowledge that we do so and show how we do it (Fine, 1994). … This will help the researcher avoid appropriating or misappropriating the subjects’ knowledges. To ask supposedly neutral questions of people who have been bombarded and continue to be bombarded by racist ideology (some of it presented as science) and oppression, will not further the cause of anti-racism. (2005, p. 257)

He also writes: “But that interpretation has to be done with, rather than for, the people in a space that is safe, free, and sensitive to the power relationships involved” (p. 257). I used this method sparingly and judiciously in the few cases where it seemed that a participant might have been approaching racial matters solely from an individual perspective without paying attention to the structural aspects in what seemed to me to be contradiction to her/his own stated commitments. In those cases, I gently probed—not to bring the participant into a position that agreed with me, but to allow the participant to
elaborate her/his position with respect to mine. The participant thus had the opportunity to explain her/his position to resolve the contradictions I raised or to explain where I might have misunderstood. In some cases, the apparent contradiction was not resolved for me, but the participant felt comfortable with it, so we moved on. In Appendix IV, I present two examples of my use of the interventive in-depth interviewing technique for the reader’s contemplation.

Despite my occasional use of the interventive approach, I expressly and sincerely regarded the participants as experts in the field of racial equity work, and throughout the interviews looked to them—most of whom have been doing this work longer than I—for genuine advice about how to do this work. I can acknowledge that having started a new job in racial equity work at around the same time as I was concluding these interviews, I received and was able to put into practice many of the valuable insights the participants shared. In fact, some of the relationships forged through the research process have become ongoing professional relationships.

3.1.2 Grounded Theory as Research Methodology

Those engaged in seeking the eradication of racial inequity have often been waylaid by the imperative to prove the reality of racism to those whose interests lie in maintaining the inequitable status quo. This is not to say that it is not important to make a sound and verifiable case for the existence of racism in specific social settings and contexts. However, this cannot extend to the general project of having to establish the general existence of structural racism in Euro-North American societies for those who would justify it regardless of how blatantly it is manifest (Dei et al., 2004, pp. 8-9) in order to stall progress toward racial equity. Keeping this in mind, this study is a post-
positivist, qualitative research study to the extent that it does not attempt to pose or verify hypotheses—least of all the reality of racism. Rather, it takes as its point of departure the assumption that racism and white dominance exist and significantly structure human relationships in Euro-North American society, as I have argued in Chapter 1 and the foregoing section of this chapter. Through the literature review in the previous chapter, I also made the case that whiteness is a factor even within collaborations between Blacks and Whites for racial equity. With these as points of departure, this study seeks to discover and theorize exactly how (not whether) these racial dynamics play out within the context of racial equity alliances. The research methodology I find most appropriate (with some modifications) for undertaking such an investigation is Grounded Theory.

According to its original proponents, “[t]he goal of grounded theory is to generate a conceptual theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved. The goal is not voluminous description, nor clever verification” (Glaser, 1978, p. 91; Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 3). The approach seeks to determine how a particular social group manages their concerns within a particular context. Through a process of open coding with “a minimum of preconception” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 9), the researcher determines what each segment of the data seems to represent, and repeatedly compares portions of the data among themselves. Using inductive reasoning, the researcher groups similar data together to form categories, and compares further data to these conceptual categories. Though in the initial stages of coding several tentative categories may be created from the data, these categories are only carried forward if there are sufficient (usually 5) incidences of it occurring in the
data. Throughout the process, as the researcher examines the data, s/he attempts to answer the following questions:

"What is this data a study of?" "What category does this incident indicate?" "What is actually happening in the data?" "What is the main concern being faced by the participants?" and "What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?" (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 9, emphasis in original. See also Glaser, 1978, p. 57).

The researcher also eventually isolates a “core variable”—that is, a category that “account[s] for most of the variation around the concern or problem that is the focus of the study” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 10), and which will become the foundational aspect of the theory generated by the study. This core category or variable represents the essence of what is occurring in the research setting, and integrates the other categories. The other categories are now subordinated to the core category, and represent variations and elaborations on the theme expressed by the core category (Glaser, 1978, p. 61).

Thus, the categories, the core variable, and ultimately the theory generated through the process are said to have “emerged” from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4), and are “grounded” in the data rather than imposed upon it.

Consistent with this emergent process, is the way that relevant literature is handled. The proponents of Grounded Theory de-emphasize the importance of reviewing the literature before data collection begins. They suggest that the researcher only becomes aware of the relevant literature once the categories and core variables begin to emerge. The literature is also treated more as further data than as a mold which the findings from the study must fit. Thus, the emergent theory is placed in conversation with the literature rather than subordinated to it (Dick, 2005; Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 9).
In the process of considering research methodologies I might use, I selected Grounded Theory as an appropriate methodology for this work because it aspires to allow the research participants to direct the focus of the research—that is to identify the central problem or issue. This study depends heavily upon the assumption that oppressed people (Blacks in this instance) have the capacity to theorize their own lives, and to do so on their own terms (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 302; Delpit, 1988; hooks, 1992b). Thus, a Grounded Theory methodology as described above has the potential to capture the insights of this everyday theorizing since the relevant categories, variables and theory are drawn from the interview data the participants provide. While the researcher uses a particular frame of reference or discursive framework to approach the study—while not forcing the data to fit an a priori theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 262)—and therefore must have a “theoretical sensitivity” (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 8) to that which the data presents, it is the participants who, through their narratives, are indicating the phenomena salient to them. This methodology is consistent with a critical antiracist/anticolonial perspective in that it does not dictate to participants from outside what their most salient concerns should be.

The reader will also notice that I have used numerous, and sometimes lengthy, excerpts from the interview data. I feel that this is important in a study that claims to be grounded in the experience and perspectives of the research participants, because it makes clear to the reader the “evidential” basis from which I have drawn the insights,

22 These theories of the everyday are lived and may not be (but may well be) easily articulated, and certainly will not always be readily apparent to the outside observer. In many ways, and particularly in a Grounded Theory methodology, the role of the researcher is to articulate these theories and “translate” them into the language of academic research for consumption by an academic audience. The researcher’s work cannot be taken as the last word on the presentation of these theories of the everyday. However, ideally, through careful methodological decisions and a close accounting of her/his subject position such that it can be tracked, the researcher’s work will be a relevant and useful rendition of these theories.
inferences, and ultimately the theoretical claims that I have made from the research data. Consistent with a qualitative research methodology, and as I have discussed in Section 3.1, the presentation of numerous and lengthy excerpts is one of my attempts to account for my journey through the research process, providing the reader an opportunity to understand the basis upon which the theoretical claims of the study have been made, to evaluate the groundedness of the research, and to assess its applicability to other contexts.

In harmony with the place of the literature discussed above, the reader will notice that while I have provided a review of the literature as a point of departure, many of the later chapters of this document are supplemented with additional theoretical literature. The place of this literature was not evident until the theory began to emerge, and it was the emergent themes that sent me to the literature. The juxtaposition of this literature among the discussion of the data is meant to mirror the process whereby it became relevant to the study, and serves to bring it into conversation with the data.

3.1.3 The Issue of Subjectivity, Power, and Unequal Relations

When we speak about emergent themes and theory in the context of qualitative research, there is a pernicious tendency to understand this in ways that neatly excise the researcher from her/his role in the construction of the knowledge claims generated in the study (Fine, 1994, pp. 19-23). I wish to immediately distance myself from any such understanding. Whether or not they are appropriately acknowledged and consistently acted upon, the philosophical assumptions that undergird qualitative research epistemologies fundamentally question traditional positivistic views about knowledge production. Qualitative research epistemologies posit that “all knowing is viewed as
taking place in transaction between what’s ‘out there’ and the ‘self’” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 5), and that the only way that we can know the “world” is through our own perceptions and experiences.\(^{23}\) If this is so, then we have no way of evaluating how close our ontologies are to that which they attempt to describe since we do not have access to “reality” except via our consciousness (Eisner, 1991, p. 45-56, 53; Eisner, 1993). Thus, there is no way that the researcher, or any knower, can “stand outside” of the research setting. These premises come together to make it clear that the knower is deeply and irrevocably embedded in any effort to know, and that the assumed boundaries between subject and object, knower and known, are blurred. Knowledge, then, becomes a function of the human capacity to order, classify, and interpret—that is, to “make sense” of—one’s myriad experiences, and is dependent upon these experiences. As Dei writes:

> The notion that sociology, anthropology and the social sciences are capable of revealing real lives of people through their methods … is no longer taken for granted. While these methods do offer ways of securing knowledge and understanding in the social world, it is important that we recognize that individual and collective politics, ideologies and desires shape what we do. … Position arguably constitutes social interpretation. (Dei, 1996b, p. 249, emphasis in original)

Clearly, then, Grounded Theory methodology, as a knowledge-producing endeavour, is also necessarily shot through with the researcher’s subjectivity. First, while the researcher is open to hearing from the participants about what is most salient to them, the researcher delimits the discussion by setting the initial focus of inquiry and by creating the interview schedule which shapes the conversation. Second, and more

\(^{23}\)In denying the existence and salience of the spiritual (as most mainstream Western academic discourses do) these epistemologies do not recognize or value transcendental ways of knowing. However, this debate is beyond the scope of the discussion at hand.
importantly (if less obviously) the researcher’s interests, experiences, and training predispose her/him to focus upon certain issues, and make certain connections as opposed to others in the process of creating categories and isolating themes from the raw data. Indeed, in descriptions of Grounded Theory methodology—in particular, of theoretical sensitivity and allowing categories and the core variable to emerge without “forcing the data”—the researcher is constantly reminded that she must trust herself. For example, Glaser writes:

> It is in the beginning with open coding—and a minimum of preconception—that the analyst is most tested as to his [sic] trust in himself [sic] and in the grounded method, his [sic] skill to use the method and his [sic] ability to generate codes and find relevance. (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 10, emphasis added)

Whether or not this is what Glaser intends, this amounts to nothing but an acknowledgement that the researcher is simultaneously the research instrument—somewhat equivalent to the microscopes, scales and the like in scientific research (Eisner, 1991, pp. 49-53)—and is therefore very much implicated in any knowledge created through the research process. S/he does not stand apart from it at some ostensible objective distance.

However, that researcher subjectivity is an important part of any research project ought not to be considered inherently negative. To consider it so would betray an inability to appropriately lay aside positivistic concerns around objectivity, or more accurately, to fail to see that positivistic research methodologies cannot make good on their claims to objectivity. However, in a research project that purports to be critical and to challenge relationships of domination, once there is an acknowledgement that the researcher’s subjectivity is implicated in the study, the questions now become:
1. What (power) relationships are set up between researcher, participants, and the knowledge generated?

2. What potential is there for these relationships to be oppressive or exploitative?

3. How might this oppression or exploitation be avoided?

and

4. What is the impact of the researcher’s views on the analysis?

What follows in this chapter is my attempt to deal with these questions. I have come to the conclusion that denying the inevitability of unequal power relations in a research project and claiming completely egalitarian relationships is akin to denying the implication of the researcher in her/his research, and claiming an elusive objectivity. I think that it is important to acknowledge that power relationships exist in a research setting, and that these cannot be escaped (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 139). What is necessary, however, is that we be aware of these power imbalances and that we make our negotiation of these contradictions explicit. This way, others can trace our paths to our conclusions, opening up the possibility for them to dissent with our conclusions. This is not unlike what this study will argue is appropriate stance for white racial equity workers.

It is also necessary to recognize that our research participants have myriad ways to exert power and resistance—even in those instances where the researcher’s power seems to be greater than theirs, and especially where they feel that an interview or the research is not leading in directions they prefer and anticipate (Scheurich, 1997, pp. 70-73). Thus, the power in these relationships is seldom unilateral.

These negotiations and recognitions are part of the academic conversation, and it is part of maintaining humility but responsibility, equity but accountability in
relationships that can potentially be exploited. Below is how I discuss how I negotiate and challenge my own power as the researcher based on the discursive frameworks in which I locate this work. In the context of this particular study, my major concerns are my power, in both data-gathering and analysis to:

1. enter into unequal relations
2. racialize and/or essentialize
3. marginalize voices and perspectives.

3.1.3.1 Undermining Unequal Relations: Informed Consent and Reciprocation

There are a number of ways in which the relationship between researcher and study participant can be unequal in terms of power and can become exploitative. First, the notion of researcher and participant is inherently unequal in that one is being studied and one is doing the studying. Second, in most instances, an academic study serves to credentialize the researcher, while the research participants ordinarily reap no such benefit. In this study, these imbalances were offset in the following ways:

First, the asymmetry of the researcher-participant relationship is largely offset by the ethical review and consent processes. The research project, methods, and the commitments that involvement in the project would entail were outlined in detail in an information letter/consent form presented to potential participants (see Appendix I). Individuals who were invited to participate in the study had the option not to participate, and this did occur in a number of cases where the potential participant either did not respond to my invitation, or otherwise indicated her/his unwillingness to participate. Those who did not respond were not asked for their reasons for making this choice.
Those who did participate were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any
time without consequence or explanation. All participants were offered transcripts of
their interview and any focus group they participated in, and these were provided once
available to those who requested them. Participants could have chosen to opt out at this
stage as well. Through these measures, the researcher-participant relationships were not
coercive, and were in many ways unsettled if not equalized. The power imbalance
seemed particularly unsettled to me as I realized the participants’ open-ended option to
withdraw from the study. Fortunately no-one did.

Second, I endeavoured to balance the fact that this study was partially an
academic credentializing endeavour for me. Again, the information letter/consent form
outlined plainly that this was so, giving potential participants the option to decline
participation. Further, as I mention above, I recognized the potential for these
conversations to be a space of validation since Blacks are able to share their experiences
without having them negated or denied (Tate, 1994). This is particularly so for the Black
racial equity workers who do not often have the opportunity to unburden themselves and
discuss their work in a safe environment where they can express the joys and frustrations
of the work. In fact, in at least one instance a participant expressed that he had consented
to participate for precisely this reason, and looked forward to the focus group opportunity
to further explore his ideas and work with others doing similar work. Also, where I used
interventive in-depth interviewing techniques (Okolie, 2005) I suggest (hopefully not
presumptuously) that I stimulated participants to hone the theoretical stances and
rationales that support their work in a non-threatening way. The participants thereby gain
an opportunity to verbally articulate stances they may not have had opportunities to
articulate before, and to critically examine their own positions in a way that makes them better able to defend them. Finally, antiracism is politically motivated and action-oriented (Dei, 1996a, p. 25; Dei, 2005, p. 12). Since this study is an antiracist study, it is produced not simply to create knowledge for its own sake, but to advance the cause of racial equity and, in this case, Black liberation, through the study of these racial equity coalitions. It is my sincere hope that the completed study will in this manner support the work of the study participants and all Black racial equity workers who collaborate with Whites as they do their work. Study participants will be notified when the study is complete, and will be offered copies of the completed study upon request.

In these ways, then, I seek to “give back” to my participants in ways that were not paternalistic, but which would equalize the benefits that come from the study.

3.1.3.2 Undermining Racialization and Essentialism: Participant Selection, Self-Identification

The ten participants in this study were self-identified Blacks living in Canada who have worked with white people on initiatives that expressly seek racial equity. The participants were selected by means of a purposive snowball sampling method. I began by contacting, as potential participants, key Black individuals affiliated with racial equity organizations, groups, and initiatives with a mandate for racial equity. I then also requested referrals from these individuals to other possible participants. Participants making referrals were not informed as to whether or not those they referred participated in the study.

Studies similar to this one have sometimes been criticized for reifying racial categories because of the fact that they take racial groups as given or as an independent
variable. In a context where dominant conceptions of race and racism understand the social construction of race to mean that racial categories have little meaning, and where it is felt that the invoking of these categories—even for the political purpose of resisting racism—is itself racist, the fact that this study speaks of Black racial equity workers and white racial equity workers might be considered by some to reinforce rather than challenge racism. In response to this, it is important to make clear that speaking about racism and antiracism does not reify race any more than attempting to not talk about them will cause racism to cease to exist (Dei, 1996b, p. 255-256; 2006a). Racial inequity is a concept that cannot simply be reduced to some other sociological concept such as class struggle or cultural difference (Omi & Winant, 1993). However, it is also clear that race is crosscut by other axes of social identity such as gender, class, religion, dis/ability, sexuality, language and the like, making the race concept an extremely slippery one with indistinct boundaries. Yet it is still necessary to be able to name race, keeping its complexity in mind, in order to identify and track racial inequity, and to challenge the unequal distribution of power and privilege based upon racial reasoning and ideology.

To deny this, and to attempt to prematurely invoke and overemphasize the malleability of racial identifications is politically suspect. As I have written, elsewhere:

when one looks at the appalling realities of anti-Black racial profiling by criminal justice, employment and educational systems here in Canada—the statistically demonstrated existence of the “driving while Black charge (e.g. Rankin et. al., 2002); that the employment rates for Black university graduates equals that of White grade ten dropouts (e.g. Solyom, 2001); that Black students are pushed out of schools in disproportionate numbers (see Dei et. al., 1997),—what, indeed, is the purpose of trying to micro-analyse who/what is Black and/or who/what is White when this is so clear with respect to the distribution of privilege and punishment at the systemic level? (Howard, 2006, p. 49)
That said, it is still important to ascertain that a research study that intends to be antiracist does not employ the logic of racialization in its methods, attributing labels to people that they might not apply to themselves, and/or buying into monolithic conceptions of groups, whether politically or ethnically defined. The information letter/consent form presented to potential participants outlines clearly who I was seeking to interview using the terms “Black” and “African Canadian” interchangeably (see Appendix I). Further, before interviewing began, participants were asked to fill out a Background Information Survey (see Appendix II) where they were asked to indicate their race or ethnicity. Seven of the participants identified their race/ethnicity as “Black.” Two indicated a Pan-African identity, one using the term “African ancestry,” and the other using a hyphenated identity beginning with African (although neither of them was born or has lived on the African continent, and although those participants who were born on the African continent chose the designation “Black”). One participant used a hyphenated designation including the country of his birth followed by “Canadian,” but identified as Black throughout the interview with statements like “us as Black people” and “our Black people.” As far as determining who is white is concerned, no participant asked me what I meant by white, and all were readily able to identify white colleagues. Recalling that in a Grounded Theory methodology, the participants’ narratives indicate their concerns, it is important to note that none of the participants found the racial designations “Black” and “white” problematic, though one indicated that he preferred the term “of African descent/ancestry” to refer to Blacks. The participants did not enter into discussions about how these labels were applied. This does not mean that the participants do not understand the sometimes slippery and contextual nature of racial identities. Some
of them expressed caveats and gave disclaimers that indicate their discomfort with making broad generalizations about groups. Further, there are instances where after describing the approach of a white colleague that s/he particularly appreciated, the participant indirectly brought the meaning of the colleague’s white body into question. In a paradoxical manner, these participants claim that, in general, they do not encounter Whites who take these careful and respectful approaches to racial equity work even as they describe white colleagues who do. These seemingly contradictory narratives do not indicate some sinister effort on the part of the participant to negate the positive antiracist actions of their white colleagues and hold to narrow definitions of whiteness, because these participants clearly identify these colleagues as white, and as models for all white racial equity workers to emulate. Instead, these instances seem to give us a window into a point where the participants are identifying slippage between whiteness and the white body, and suggesting that where Whites are thus able to undermine white dominance and racism, the very meaning of the white racial location is transformed. Thus the participants are aware of the slipperiness of racial categories, particularly under liminal conditions. However, the participants are not pre-occupied with this, and do not display the post-modern tendency to undermine racial identities to the point that they undermine and paralyze resistance efforts.

With respect to diversity within Blackness, this study is framed within a Critical Integrative Antiracism framework that recognizes the salience of race, while also acknowledging that race is complicated by other axes of oppression. Consequently, though the group I was interested in interviewing was Black racial equity workers, making Blackness my entry point, I also sought to build into my participant sample as
wide a variation of other social locations (such as gender, age, place of birth, occupation, length of time in Canada, province of residence) as possible. This was not in an attempt to get a “representative sample,” but simply to give the study access to a rich variety of Black perspectives. This approach recognizes that there is no monolithic Black experience and avoidsessentializing Blackness. It points to diversity and unity within community, which I discuss further in the next section. Table 1 below presents some of the variety among the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Men - 5</th>
<th>Women - 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>Canada - 3</td>
<td>Ghana - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Haiti - 1</td>
<td>Jamaica - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guyana - 1</td>
<td>Somalia - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Canada (if not born in Canada)</td>
<td>12 – 35 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>30-39 yrs - 2</td>
<td>40-49 yrs - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60-69 yrs - 1</td>
<td>N/A - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of Residence</td>
<td>Ontario – 8</td>
<td>Nova Scotia - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Education (youth sector) - 1</td>
<td>Education (Tertiary) - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Sector - 1</td>
<td>General or Skilled work - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Sector (non-education) - 3</td>
<td>Elected Official - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time Doing Equity Work</td>
<td>10 – 40 years. One participant stated “all my life”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site of Racial Equity Work</td>
<td>Community-based Volunteer Organization - 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race-based Organization; Paid position - 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government - 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporation – 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-based Organization - 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union - 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools/School Boards – 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University - 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*note total numbers in this cell do not equal total number of participants because many were involved in more than one type of equity work.

Fig. 1. Variety among Black Participants in the Study
3.1.3.3 Undermining the Power to Marginalize and Romanticize: Analytical Methods and the Minority Voice

As I have discussed above, a Grounded Theory methodology utilizes a constant comparison method of analysis during which categories are created and given relevance according to the number of times incidences that belong to these categories occur in the data. There is, of course, the implicit assumption with such a method that the more popular or prevalent a particular knowledge, the more true or relevant it is. Taken to extremes, this flies in the face of critical work which would claim that certain knowledges dominate and are touted by many—not because they are more important or more “true,” but because they align with the ideologies of the powerful, who are able to use their power to propagate them (Gramsci, 1971). Clearly, those of us who claim to do critical work and insist of the validity and salience of minority positions cannot rely only upon these methods. As I ask myself in my research journal:

To what extent can I really use the frequency of stuff as a measure of salience? It seems that in a domain where what we are struggling against is the hegemony of particular views of race and racism, the participants will show varying degrees of resistance to and freedom from them. Further, in situations of power and majority/minority, justice and fairness cannot be measured in terms of what “most” are saying. So, in what ways will I be able to analyze for this without simply privileging the voices that I agree with most? What tools will I use to make these judgements? I don’t think it would be appropriate to simply call upon the theoretical framework as measure of this. How will I give attention to salient issues though they might not occur frequently?  

(Journal, August 24, 2007)

As a further concern, I wondered how to do justice to the interplay between the concepts of community and individual as they are most often understood in African

---

24 There are those who might claim that this study, which investigates collaborations between Black and white racial equity workers, marginalizes the white voice by not including white participants. I ask the reader to recall the discussions in Chapter 1 of this study that make the argument that there is quite a bit of scholarship investigating these collaborations and the identity of the white racial equity worker from the perspective of Whites (Chubbuck, 2004; Eichstedt, 2001; Fishman & McCarthy, 2005; Johnson, 2002; Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 2005; O'Brien, 2000, 2001, 2003; Thompson, 2001). Thus, this study is actually an attempt to correct the marginalization the Black voice in this context.
diasporic societies. The notion of community and the value of interpersonal relationships are of great importance in these contexts, and would have great relevance in this study of Black racial equity workers in which I seek to arrive at research results that are congruent with these notions and can truly be seen as a Black perspective on racial equity collaborations.

The work of Maxwell and Miller (1992) discussing categorizing and contextualizing approaches to qualitative data analysis has assisted me in addressing these issues. Categorizing strategies are those which analyze data on the basis of similarities and differences between units of data. Constant comparison and coding methods are an example of such a strategy (Maxwell & Miller, 1992, pp. 2-4). Contextualizing strategies seek to analyze the relationships among data as they appear in context. Narrative strategies of analysis (not simply representation) are contextualizing strategies (Maxwell & Miller, 1992pp. 4-6). Maxwell and Miller’s argument is that either of these strategies without the other limits the thoroughness of qualitative analysis. Contextualizing without categorizing can leave one trapped within the original configuration of the data and unable to make important connections and applications (Maxwell & Miller, 1992, p. 5), while categorizing without contextualizing can lead to misinterpretation and misappropriation of participants’ ideas (Maxwell & Miller, 1992, p. 4). The methods should therefore be used together to complement each other.

In my research experience, I have been drawn by the logic of this analysis, and particularly so in the present study because of the concern I express above about marginalizing minority voices and about the interplay between individual and community. While these may not be the issues that Maxwell and Miller had in mind
when writing this piece, their analysis seems to me to work well for responding to those concerns. I therefore complemented coding with an analysis method that leaned more toward the contextual end of the spectrum, and like others who have used categorizing and contextualizing methods together, I discovered insights that I never would have discovered using either method alone.

For my contextualizing strategy, I used an appropriate variation of Mauthner and Doucet’s “Voice-centered Relational Method” (1998). Mauthner and Doucet declare that their method is concerned with “how to keep respondents’ voices and perspectives alive” (p. 119), and thus confirm that their method is largely contextualizing. It is also concerned with determining the extent to which participants belonging to oppressed or marginalized groups might adopt hegemonic ideas as they narrate their lives. The method involves several close readings of each interview transcript, each with a specific objective. Mauthner and Doucet use four readings as follows:

1) First reading “for the plot and for our responses to the narrative” (p. 126)

2) Second reading “for the voice of the ‘I’” in order to “discover ‘how she speaks of herself before we speak of her’” (p. 128)

3) Third reading “for how the respondents spoke about their interpersonal relationships” (p. 131)

4) Fourth reading “placing people within cultural contexts and social structures” (p. 132)

After these four readings, the authors proceed into categorizing strategies.

I adapted this method for this project. The four readings I did were:
1) First reading to determine the recurring terms, concepts and metaphors used by the participant. This gave me a sense of their frames for understanding their collaboration with Whites in racial equity work. For each such theme I created a short summary paragraph in the voice of the participant\footnote{Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997, pp. 70-78) explain this process of creating vignettes about participants in the first person, building from the participants’ own words. Though it seems presumptuous, Ely et. al. explain how these work as “interpretive tools” and help the researcher to reflect on “how you are representing the participants in your study or how you might proceed with the report” (p. 72). They also help the researcher “identify gaps, silences and contradictions you might address” (p. 72). While these authors advocate for writing such narratives directly into the final research report, I preferred to limit their use to the process of my thinking about the overall meaning I felt I was getting from each participant’s interview.}

2) Second reading for the voice of the ‘I,’ in my case, in order to get a feel for the participants sense of personal agency and resistance

3) Third reading for statements of obligation (have to, ought to, must, etc.) in order to get a sense of the ways the participant might be constrained by social structures (p. 132), or alternatively, for the things they felt were imperatives in racial equity work.

4) Fourth reading for the participant’s understanding of power and how it plays out in the context of racial equity collaborations with Whites.

For each participant, I also isolated a key excerpt from the interview that seemed to express the essence of the message the participant communicated through the interview.

In my particular analysis process, I did the categorizing and constant comparison first and determined the core category(ies) of the research. Subsequently, I did the voice-centered readings, and incorporated the insights gleaned from these to fill out and add to the emergent framework determined through the constant comparison method. This was necessary because contextualizing approaches, by their nature, tend toward a lower level of abstraction and theory elaboration than categorizing strategies. Thus, bringing them...
into conversation with an already partially elaborated framework served to improve the theory-building potential of the contextualizing analysis. Also, by doing this I did not depart from a grounded, emergent method and was able to bring community/group and individual perspectives into the type of interaction and synergy that mirrors community relationships as described above.

A final concern in data analysis is that of not romanticizing the Black voice. I have insisted that Blacks will have insights about whiteness because of how they are socially positioned with respect to whiteness. However, the existence of dominant, hegemonic ideas about race and racism—most notably in the present historical context, colour-blind and liberal individualist ideas—I am aware that Black voices may not be, and usually are not, voices of pure resistance (Okolie, 2005, p. 257). From within an Afrocentric discursive framework, I easily acknowledge this and recognize the importance of teasing out when and where this might be happening. However, the questions for me then became: “How might I assess where a particular participant is located on the spectrum between resistance and and hegemonic views? And how might I make these determinations in a way that does not simply amount to my dismissing the perspectives with which I am personally uncomfortable? And how do I do any of this while still asserting the ability of the oppressed to theorize their own lives? I find responses to these questions in the Afrocentric methodology of “sentinel statements” (Asante, 2002). Asante writes:

To delineate the main contours of the critical canon of analytical Afrocentricity, I seek to establish the idea of sentinel statements as positive identifiers in the process of cultural and historical [and I add, racial] dislocation. The objective of such a critical process is to determine the degree to which a writer or speaker, from a rhetorical point of view, demonstrates centeredness with the African or African American cultural experience. (Asante, 2002, p. 97)
Sentinel statements are “those statements that signal a text’s location during the earliest parts of an analysis [and] are used as standards by which the Afrocentrist views an entire text” (Asante, 2002, p. 98). Using this concept, I was able during the voice-centred analysis to seek out sentinel statements in the early moments of the interview which could be used to contextualize the entire interview and give clues as to the participant’s degree of centredness in a critical perspective on racism and racial dominance. In this manner, determinations about the participants location were made on the basis of internal consistency of the interview, and as a crosscheck the sentinel statement for each interview matched well with the key excerpts from the interviews. It also turned out that the idea of sentinel statements is congruent with a criterion three of the participants use for assessing their white colleagues. They speak of carefully listening to their white colleagues’ speech to gather cues as to the white colleague’s orientation with respect to whiteness and domination, and to make decisions about whether to invest in a relationship on that basis. It therefore seems quite fair and appropriate to apply a similar standard to the participants themselves.

The benefits of this analysis allowed me to understand more deeply what each participant was saying, and it did not require me to be dismissive of any perspective. Instead, I was provoked to make connections between the participant’s stance and the other mediating circumstances in their lives. No participant’s responses were “disqualified,” and I kept track of how frequently I was using excerpts from each participant’s narratives in the thesis in order to maintain some sense of equitably representing the many participant perspectives. Appendix V shows this tracking. The number of excerpts used for each participant roughly correlates with the length of her/his
I believe that through these methods I have gleaned a relevant, broad, and nuanced Black perspective which includes its contradictions and imperfections—in effect, its humanness.

3.1.4 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the fact that I did not ask participants to disclose information about disability or sexual orientation because of concerns about “outing.” One of the participants is a long-time advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, though it is not clear whether this person has a disability. My participants also come from only two Canadian provinces. However, as I have noted in Section 3.1.3.2, the participants come from a variety of countries of origin; class, age, first language, and religious backgrounds; as well as a variety of contexts in which they do their racial equity work.

Institutional time constraints associated with the degree program I am in made it such that I was unable to repeatedly return to the field to engage in theoretical sampling—that is, seeking specific information to saturate categories emerging as salient as the researcher conducts the analysis (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 10) in search of verification and elaboration of my core categories. I therefore was limited to the data I collected in the first round of interviews and the focus group, as well as the responses I received to one further question I asked the participants as the theory emerged. The time constraints also precluded a feedback loop where I could include participants in the data analysis or ask them for feedback about the findings. I have made every effort to remain as true to the data as possible, and I thoroughly outline my subject location, discursive
frameworks and methods. Nevertheless, I take full responsibility for the knowledge generated within the study, along with any errors, omissions and misinterpretations.

A total of ten participants took part in the study. Results from this study do not claim to be automatically generalizeable to Blacks or Black Canadians as a whole. The study acknowledges the contextuality and specificity of the theory elaborated herein. However, I do feel that this study does provide a relevant elaboration, however contextualized and frozen in a specific time, of the dynamics of collaborations between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work. It is hoped that readers in (or attempting to understand) similar situations will find resonance and applicability in the findings. The elaboration of discursive frameworks, subject location, and analysis methods will assist in determining the context in which this study is embedded, and thus help the reader in the process of determining whether and where the findings of this study apply.

3.1.5 Introducing Participants

In this section, I introduce the participants in the study. The information here will be somewhat sparse in an effort to preserve participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. While the consent form (see Appendix 1) made the participants aware of the limits around the amount of anonymity I could provide given the small community of racial equity workers, I still consider it my duty to preserve their anonymity as much as possible. I present them in alphabetical order of their pseudonyms.

Ajani is the youngest of the participants and is in his late twenties. He was born in the West Indies but moved to Canada at a very early age. He designates his race/ethnicity as “Afrikan Ancestry.” Ajani works in the service sector, but this is not the
location of his racial equity work. Ajani has been doing racial equity work for fifteen years in an awareness-raising group that uses poetry, music, popular culture and technology to spread its message. Our interview lasted just over two hours.

Beverly is a school principal with many years of experience in the education sector. She is in her sixties. She was born in the West Indies and moved to Canada as an adult in her thirties. She designates her race/ethnicity as “Black.” Beverly has been doing racial equity work for close to thirty years, and her racial equity work has taken place within educational institutions as part of her employment, as a member of educators’ antiracism and equity organizations, as well as in the community where she has been a member of various cultural organizations and municipal race relations organizations. Our interview lasted for an hour as this was one of my later interviews. Therefore, in keeping with grounded theory methodology, we were able to focus the interview on the themes that had already begun to emerge from previous interview data.

Diane was born and raised in Canada, and her ancestry in Canada goes back generations. She is in her fifties and works in academia. She designates her race/ethnicity as Black. Diane has been doing equity work for twenty years, and most of this work has been within the context of her service work as an academic. Our interview lasted approximately one-hour-and-a-half. It might have lasted much longer, but we were constrained by commitments that we both had and could not avoid.

Imani is a retired education professional in her sixties. She was born in Canada to immigrant parents and identifies her race/ethnicity as “B”—presumably for Black. She refers to herself as Black in the interview. Imani has done her racial equity work at several sites including the educational institutions within which she has worked, unions,
racial equity organizations, and the boards of various public and private sector organizations. Our interview lasted two-and-a-half hours.

James was born on the African continent and moved to Canada as an adolescent. He designates his race/ethnicity as Black. James is in his late forties and works in government. His place of employment is also the site of his racial equity work where he oversees a racial equity program. He has been doing racial equity work for ten years. This interview lasted almost an hour-and-a-half—thirty minutes longer than the time James said he had for the interview when we started. He found the topic interesting and was willing to allow me to ask all my interview questions.

Keith was born in the Caribbean and migrated to Canada in his early twenties. He designates his race/ethnicity using a designation tying together his place of birth and “Canadian.” Keith is now in his early fifties. Keith works as a unionized worker in industry, and does some of his racial equity work in that context. However, the bulk of his racial equity work is done at the community level where he has been a member of community cultural groups and served on the race relations committees of a number of local public sector service-providing organizations. Our interview lasted for close to three hours. A great deal of that time was spent clarifying for ourselves what we meant by terms that we were using such as “community.” Our slightly different definitions of these terms were not immediately apparent in the interview, so as these emerged, we did a fair amount of back-tracking for clarification.

Maryam was born in the African continent and migrated to Canada as an adult in her late twenties. She is in her early forties. Maryam designates her race/ethnicity as Black and says she has been doing racial equity work for as long as she has been in
Canada. Maryam began racial equity work as a volunteer with local community organizations of people coming from the same country as her, and continues this work in the government departments in which she has worked. Our interview lasted for almost two hours.

Quentin was born in Canada, and traces his Canadian ancestry back for generations. He did not share his age, but is in at least his mid-fifties. Quentin designates his race/ethnicity as with a designation tying together his African heritage and the Canadian province of his birth. Quentin says that he has been doing racial equity work all his life. He has worked in academia, in government and as an elected public official. He indicates that he has done his equity work in academia, but during his interview, indicates that he has also done this work in Black community initiatives challenging racism in education and other public sector organizations. Unfortunately, our interview lasted only forty-five minutes as we had to squeeze it in among other unavoidable appointments we both had that day.

Sharon is in her late thirties, and was born in the Caribbean, moving to Canada as an adolescent. Sharon designates her race/ethnicity as Black. Sharon has been employed by various Black community organizations with a mandate to challenge racial inequity. This is where she has done her racial equity work, which she has been doing for ten years. Her interview also reveals that she has been a part of many race-based student organizations as well. Sharon has also worked as an academic. My interview with Sharon lasted just over two hours.

Terrence was born in the West Indies and migrated to Canada thirty-four years ago. Terrence does not share his age, but designates his race/ethnicity as Black.
Terrence works in the corporate sector, and has been doing racial equity work for approximately ten years. The site of his racial equity work has been in the corporate environment and in government. Our interview lasted two hours, again longer than Terrence indicated he was available at the beginning of the interview. He expressed his desire to answer all the questions.

3.1.6 Who or What is the White Racial Equity Worker?

This study inquires into the relationships between Black and white racial equity workers. In conceiving the study, I deliberately defined the term racial equity worker as anyone involved in initiatives that acknowledge the existence of racism and seek to eradicate it or to achieve more racially equitable circumstances. I selected the Black participants based on this definition, and asked them to consider themselves eligible for the study if they had worked with Whites who fit the same description.

Throughout the course of the interviews, some participants occasionally used the term “antiracist” to refer to racial equity workers. However, in writing up the research, I made the deliberate choice not to use the term “antiracist” to refer to the participants and their colleagues since this term has become quite fuzzy in the existing empirical literature. For example, O’Brien’s (2001) study defines the white antiracist as follows: “Antiracists, quite simply, are people who have committed themselves, in thought, action and practice, to dismantling racism,” (p. 4), and she makes the important distinction between the passive “nonracist” and the active “antiracist” (pp. 4-5). Her definition also depends heavily upon how the white participants in her research defined themselves (p. 5), and upon the manifestos of the antiracist groups to which the participants belonged (pp. 12-14). However, I contend that this definition is anything but simple, and the
complexity is compounded by its reliance upon self-definition and ideology. For example, while some other studies claim that white antiracists all buy into a particular structural definition of racism that excludes colour-blindness (e.g., Eichstedt, 2001, pp. 454-455; Johnson, 2002, p. 155), others such as O’Brien (2000) claim that there are some individuals who are simultaneously antiracist and colour-blind—that is, that some persons engaged in opposing overtly racist groups and activity hold firmly to a/n (future) egalitarian vision where race doesn’t matter, and therefore insist on being colour-blind in the present.

The term “antiracist,” for me, implies an individual with a very specific politics and an understanding of race and racism that is in full harmony with the tenets of Critical Integrative Antiracism as defined by Dei (1996a; 1996b; 2000c). While I am quite certain that it would also be interesting and informative to study relationships between white and Black colleagues who fit this very specific description, I did not feel that this would have application and resonance for any but the very small number of persons working in those circumstances. Also, there would be somewhat less breadth to the study because it would be investigating relationships founded on agreement on so many of the concepts and terms that would otherwise be points of negotiation.

The confusion over the term “antiracist” in the context of empirical research, then, is that of trying to define individuals based on their work as well as their ideological commitments, not all of which are immediately apparent in the work they do, or easily distinguished from the ostensibly antiracist work of those with other commitments. This results in a number of methodological problems that are difficult to resolve. My term, “racial equity worker” reflects my decision to identify participants based upon the kinds
of work that they do, and to stay away from trying to pinpoint and make judgments about the personal paradigms underpinning their work. This is, most often, the implicit definition being used by other studies, but the term “racial equity worker” seeks to clarify this and bring the terminology into alignment. For consistency, I also refer to the work these persons do as racial equity work rather than antiracist work.

Thus, the types of racial equity roles that the participants and their colleagues held included roles such as: antiracism trainers in community organizations, corporate sector and government employees working in departments or having portfolios focussed upon racial (and other axes of) equity, school board equity consultants, entertainers (or edutainers, to use their language) doing critical race work; and community members on organizational and public service community liaison race relations teams. Given the explanations that the participants received in writing and verbally when they were given information about the study, it was not up to me to decide whether any of these roles might only nominally be racial equity roles. I left this to the participants to decide. My personal commitment to the tenets of Critical Integrative Antiracism and the way that this work should be done remain intact, but the distinction I am making here is a response to the methodological imperative to operationalize the issues at stake in the study.

This approach to the definitions is also very important for comprehending the dynamic involved in this study. Recalling that racial equity work has become quite popular, no longer takes place only in traditional “activist” settings, and that there are now many paid private and public sector positions that are at least nominally pursuing racial equity, I felt that by using these broader definitions the study would more closely represent the actual conditions in Canada under which Blacks and Whites might become
involved in racial equity collaborations with each other. This definition also leaves room for participants who fit the more narrow definitions. This therefore makes the study more likely to resonate with a larger number of persons involved in racial equity work. Further, given my own experiences, motivations, and interests, the study would also speak to the kinds of collaborations in which I have been involved.

Is there some disposition or level of understanding that might consistently distinguish between those Whites involved in racial equity work and those who are not despite this activity-focused definition? The Black participants in this study drew no sharp and clear distinctions in terms of character traits, knowledge, or credentials between Whites involved in racial equity work and those who were not. The fact that the participants made no such distinction was not because they did not understand who I was interested in hearing about. The information sheet/consent form clearly describes that they are qualified for the study on the basis of having worked in collaborations with white racial equity workers. Further, during the interviews I repeatedly clarified for myself that the participants were speaking about Whites involved in racial equity work. I clarified that they were not just talking about the average liberal-minded white person in Canada who might disdain racism, but who is not actively involved in racial equity work or committed to challenging institutional forms of racism. In each case, the participants assured me that they were, indeed, speaking about racial equity workers. However, clearly in their minds there was no definite and reliable credential, experience, epiphany, or trait—other than, of course, their involvement in racial equity work—that distinguished Whites involved in racial equity work from those who are not.
In contrast, consistent with my activity-focused definition of the white racial equity worker, the participants were easily able to identify those actions and approaches that made a white racial equity worker effective. They were thus able to make distinctions between effective and ineffective racial equity work. However, they were apparently reluctant to make clear distinctions between the ideological and political commitments of those Whites involved in racial equity work and those who were not. In other words, they were unwilling to assume that white racial equity workers had any particular shared ideological or political commitments that set them apart from other Whites who are not involved in this work.

This finding sets the stage for the rest of this research report. While in some instances there may certainly be conditions, experiences, and realizations that motivate Whites to become involved in racial equity work, we cannot assume that involvement in racial equity work necessarily implies that there has been any epistemological or ethical/moral transformation. Thus, the white racial equity worker may be motivated and have good intentions, but may still be firmly embedded in the epistemological and ethical/moral assumptions of mainstream Euro-North American societies, many of which actually support and maintain racial inequity.

3.1.7 Outline of the Thesis Chapters

This matter discussed in the foregoing section sets the stage for the main findings from the data which will be elaborated in the ensuing chapters. To foreshadow and present the outline of the thesis, the first category/concept that seemed to emerge and become a potential core category was that of the epistemological saliency of the Black
body in racial equity work, and the importance of this knowledge in racial equity work. This is the subject of Chapter 4. Another potential core category/concept that emerged was that asserting that the Black racial equity workers felt that Whites were important to include in racial equity work, usually because of the power accruing to them as white bodies in white supremacist society regardless of their personal politics. This is the subject of Chapter 5.

As I examined these categories and began to make decisions about which might be the core category I would follow through with, it soon occurred to me that these categories were in dynamic tension and that this tension was the subject of another significant category in the research. In other words, the epistemological significance of the Black body in racial equity work is at odds with the power conferred upon the white body because of its location within inequitable relations of race. This matched the concept/category expressing the contradictions around involving white bodies in racial equity work—particularly when this is because of their whiteness. This, category became my core category, and is the subject of Chapter 6, supported by the many other categories that specify how these contradictions arise and what they look like.

Given the existence of these contradictions, the participants expressed terms that they use either as conditions for collaboration with Whites in racial equity work, or where they cannot opt out of these collaborations, as litmus tests that they use to gauge the potential effectiveness of the collaboration. This is the subject of Chapter 7. This chapter also includes a theorization of the embodied knowledge of the white subject, and how s/he might manage it in racial equity work.

---

26 Grounded Theory proponents suggest that while up to three core variables can emerge in a study, the study should be focused by selecting only one. Others can be followed up in subsequent projects.
Chapter 8, discusses the ways that the participants engage in resistance to whiteness and express agency within the contradictory climate of these racial equity collaborations. Fig. 2 presents a visual schematic of the thesis and its findings. The thesis concludes with Chapter 9 which summarizes the results of the study, makes connections to existing research, and suggests directions for further research.

Fig. 2. Schematic Diagram of Thesis Chapters and Results
CHAPTER 4

EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGY AND EPISTEMIC SALIENCE
IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

4.1 Introduction

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, I have used a grounded theory method to analyze the interview data gathered in this study. Through this dialectical process, salient themes in the data and the research participants’ concerns are identified by the researcher and are then ranked according to the frequency with which they occur in the data. Using this system, there were two thematic categories that emerged as the primary occupations and concerns of the participants in this study. The first of these represents insights into, and concerns around, knowledge and epistemic authority in the racial equity work that the participants do in collaboration with Whites. This chapter will investigate these concerns, looking in particular at the participants’ perspectives on:

a) the existence and nature of an embodied Black knowledge of race and racism

b) its epistemic salience (Dei, 2006b, p. 11) and vital place in racial equity work

c) the uniqueness of this knowledge and its inaccessibility to Whites

The precise ontology of race and racism—even the very existence of race and racism—are particularly contested phenomena in contemporary Canadian society, in academia as well as in popular discourse. Against this background, the participants in the study argue that a particular epistemology that is grounded in the experiences of Blacks is necessary in any racial equity work that purports to challenge anti-Black racism. This
epistemology is distinguishable from other ways of coming to know about race and
racism, such as that knowledge gained through the embodied experience of racial
privilege, and that knowledge gained through study. It may be complemented by other
knowledges and epistemologies, but cannot be replaced by them. It is therefore also
never fully accessible to those who are racially dominant. These findings resonate with
Dei’s notion of the “epistemic saliency of the subjugated voice” (Dei, 2006b, p. 11). I
flesh out these findings further below.

4.2 Embodied Knowledge: Making the Case

In this section, I discuss the participants’ assertions of an embodied knowledge of
race. I examine excerpts from the interview data, to illustrate how the participants make
the case for this type of knowledge.

The participants in this study clearly and firmly assert that there is a unique form of
knowledge about race and racism that Black racial equity workers have which is rooted in
their Blackness. Their claims to this effect are unequivocal, and there is always the
simultaneous claim that those who are white cannot lay claim to this type of knowledge.
For example, Terrence, who engages in racial equity work in the corporate sector, says:

Terrence: The first thing I would say to a white person: “Don’t ever think that
you understand the Black experience. Don’t ever look at me and say, ‘I
understand.’ You don’t! OK?”

The participants stress the dependence of this type of knowledge upon Blacks’ embodied
experiences of race—to which Whites are not, and can never be, privy. While Whites do,
indeed, possess an embodied knowledge in white supremacist society, the type of this
knowledge is extremely different from that of Blacks. I take up a discussion about white
embodied knowledge in Chapter 6.
Interestingly, the study participants illustrate this dynamic by making comparison to particular physiological experiences that women have that men are unable to have. Witness this exchange with Maryam, who has migrated to Canada from an African nation, and who presently works in the public sector. Maryam reaches for words to communicate her position—partially because English is not her first language—and at one point, Maryam switches to French to better articulate her position:

**Philip:** Do you think that being white in Canada affects the kind of antiracism work that a person can do, or affects the way that the work should be done? I’ll explain what I mean. Some people say, “Well, you know, everybody can do antiracism—white, Black, whoever—everybody can just do it. It’s the same—

**Maryam:** {cutting me off} And I don’t think so because it is a matter of experience. For example, if you are a man you don’t really know about period or about pregnancy. That’s exactly the same. If you haven’t felt—. You know, someone who is white may have a lot of problems in his or her relationships with their society or environment. But when it comes to racism, nope! Not everybody can do it, because you have to have an understanding. When you are a victim of racism or when you are a community who is a minority—. Because racism is a matter of power—economic power and at the same time the numbers. … So you can’t—, someone who hasn’t been, who hasn’t experienced the fact of being less in terms of number, or less in terms of economy can’t feel it. So it’s so—. That person may take in, ah, you know, could take as fact things that could, how shall I say, could endorse things that are not true. It’s as though you said to me “Oh, when I have my period, I feel bad,” things like that. For me it’s a matter of intimacy with, ah, you know?

**Philip:** Right. Right. So it’s more than just—

**Maryam:** Yeah it’s more.

**Philip:** Even if you go to try and learn about it, you’re saying—

**Maryam:** You are missing something. Yeah.

{underlined sentences translated from French}

Maryam works with other Whites who are involved in racial equity work, and in other parts of her interview she commends some of the Whites who do this work. So, she is not claiming that Whites cannot do this work. However, what she contends is that a
specific type of experiential knowledge is required and vital in racial equity work. This type of knowledge can only be acquired through the experience of having been racially oppressed. It is therefore as absurd for Whites to lay claim to this type of knowledge as it is for a man to speak from personal experience about monthly menses or about being pregnant. She points out that while Whites may have other experiences of oppression, this is not equivalent to the experience of racial oppression. This point will be taken up further in Section 4.5 below.

Terrence also points to mutually exclusive categories of racial experience—that is, to the manner in which one’s racial positioning, for privilege or for punishment, mediates the racial experiences one has and the ways that they are mis/understood:

**Terrence:** Diversity is not about a mental exercise. It’s about understanding in your *gut* that something is not right, and wanting to make it right. So if you have been in a power structure all your life, if you never experienced this feeling all your life—. It would be you asking me, now, to understand how a woman when they are pregnant feels. I can conceptualize it intellectually. I’ve never been pregnant. I don’t know what’s going on. … for somebody who has never, ever, experienced the kind of thing you’ve experienced, they don’t understand the nuance. They don’t understand that I can go to the health club with them, and they’re standing by my side, and they feel perfectly fine, and I feel excluded. And even if I was to turn to them and say, “This isn’t a place that I wanna be,” they more than likely would look at me and say, “Why not?” The fact that you cannot see it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. And that person cannot see it. I can!

Terrence speaks of the way the experience of racial dominance (or white embodied knowledge) confounds knowledge about race and racism, and like Maryam, Terrence refers to women’s physiological experiences to make the case that because of this Whites cannot have the visceral (“in your gut”), embodied, and experiential knowledge of race and racism that Blacks have. Terrence too, in other parts of his interview, speaks of the ways that Whites can become involved in racial equity work, and indeed, as we shall see in later chapters, he feels that white participation is essential to racial equity work. Thus,
like Maryam he is not claiming here that Whites can never understand that there is racial oppression or that they cannot be involved in racial equity work. Instead he is saying that even as men’s knowledge through bodily experiences is necessarily different from that of women, so Whites’ understanding of race and racism, part of which is also embodied, is necessarily qualitatively different from that of Blacks. They need to rely upon the intimate experiential knowledge that Blacks have of race and racism to facilitate their efforts in racial equity work.

This notion of an embodied epistemology—that is, a particular insight into race and racism through the body that is not accessible to Whites—is a view that is explicitly held by all but one of the participants in this study, and implicitly held by the other. It is clearly an important consideration for them as Black racial equity workers, and they have strong opinions about it and its place in their work.

However, before continuing to discuss the participants’ understandings of this knowledge, it is important to pause here to flesh out the implications of their using sex-based differences as a metaphor for race-based differences.

The comparison that Maryam and Terrence make when describing embodied racial knowledge is to a difference in experience between men and women based in physiology. It is clear that they use this metaphor to make their arguments because they consider this physiological, sex-based difference to be self-evident in relation to the racial differences they are trying to communicate. The reference is therefore used to elucidate the point they are trying to make.

It is important to note that their argument here is not based on a comparison between gender-based oppression and race-based oppression, but rather between a sex-
based difference and racial oppression. That is, racial oppression is not being compared to a socially constructed, gendered difference in experience such as, for example, the differing experiences of parenting that men and women have in a social world that is gender inequitable, but to physiological differences between men and women. Had it been otherwise, we would have been compelled to ask why one set of socially constructed experiences (i.e. those based on gender) might seem to the participants to be more evident or more fundamental than another set of socially constructed experiences (i.e. those based on race). It would have been necessary to problematize an apparent naturalizing or essentializing of gender difference, and what might have appeared to be an acritical rationalization of gender inequality. It is, in fact, quite reasonable to hold that gender-based differences and the disparate experiences that men and women have in a gendered society are, in fact, quite similar to race-based differences and the disparate experiences Whites and people of Colour have in a racialized society. However, this argument is, and has been, as difficult for women to make with respect to gender as it proves here for the Black participants to make with respect to race. Thus, for the participants to make such a comparison might not have served their purpose of clarifying their argument. They feel strongly about the reality and importance of a Black experiential and embodied knowledge and in attempting to forcefully communicate this, they will not risk expressing it through a comparison that they know might also be undermined and challenged by dominant discourses (or perhaps the respondents, and maybe the male respondents in particular, are, themselves, not convinced of the salience of gendered experience). They choose, therefore, to make the argument more forceful by comparing it to a physiological difference between men and women. In comparing to
physiological, *sex*-based (as opposed to socially constructed, *gender*-based) differences between men and women which generate experiences that are exclusive to women and cannot be shared by men, the participants are making clear that Blacks’ experience of race cannot be shared by Whites, and that this knowledge through experience must be regarded as an important and indispensable source of knowledge in racial equity work.

At the same time, we must be careful not to conclude another problematic interpretation of the comparison the participants are making. In the cases of both gender and race, the danger of being taken seriously about differential experiences and embodied epistemologies is that gender and race might therefore be understood as essences rather than social constructions. There is no evidence in the interview data to suggest that because the participants use a comparison to physiological difference that they therefore understand race as physiological or essential, rather than as a socially constructed. Instead, what the participants are trying to do is to make clear that Whites’ and Blacks’ experiences of race are mutually exclusive in ways that are quite similar to differences rooted in physiology, and most easily argued through that type of comparison.

This is not a contradiction. It is certainly the case that the social world is, and can be, constructed in such a way that socially constructed differences and power differentials create experiences that seem as fundamental as any physiological difference. In other words, what we are seeing here is a practical and lived demonstration of the salience of race (Dei, 1999, p. 28; 2000a; 2000c, pp. 30-31)—the fact that though race is not biology, it nevertheless cannot be dismissed as simply an illusion or as inconsequential (Omi & Winant, 1993). It should be evident to the reader that the non-scientific basis for race certainly has not, and does not, eliminate the very real material perils and penalties for
those whose bodies are marked as inferior on the basis of race (Dei, 1999, p. 17; 2000c, p. 27; Howard, 2006, p. 49; Omi & Winant, 1993) or the very considerable comforts, privileges and rewards for those positioned as superior on the basis of race (Dei, 1999, p. 26). The ongoing fallout from the processes and discourses of colonization and imperialism, both based on the construction of racial categories, continue to drastically compromise the life chances of those who have been the objects of these projects. It is these disparate ways in which differently racialized bodies are taken up within these ongoing colonial arrangements and discourses that give rise to the disparate experiences and epistemologies to which the participants refer.

4.3 Embodied Knowledge versus Scholastic Knowledge

In this section, I examine the participants’ arguments that the embodied knowledge of race is very different from, and can be contrasted with, scholastic knowledge about race and racism. I struggle here for the appropriate language to describe the comparison that the participants are making within an academic climate that validates only certain types of knowledge. In comparing and contrasting embodied and what I call here scholastic knowledge, I do not mean either to imply a hierarchy of knowledge, or to suggest that these types of knowledge are not overlapping. Indeed, much of the knowledge about race and racism produced in the academy bears the unmistakable yet undeclared mark of the embodied knowledge of the scholar. However, for the purposes of this section, I define scholastic knowledge as that acquired through scholastic endeavours. One of its major features is its claim to being disembodied.

The reader will recall Terrence’s assertion from the excerpt above, that the type of embodied racial knowledge that Blacks have is not acquired through study or other
scholastic effort, and that the racial equity work they do as a result is not a disembodied cerebral endeavour27 (“diversity is not about a mental exercise”). Other participants echo this sentiment. Keith is a Canadian who migrated from the Caribbean many years ago. He does most of his racial equity work at the community level, and says:

**Keith:** I feel so much confidence in any environment that I’m in that I can talk about our issues, and I can talk about the community issues, because I’ve lived it, and I’ve been involved in it. So I’m not talking about something I read in the newspaper and say, “Oh man. I didn’t know all this stuff was going on in Canadian City F.”

And later:

**Keith:** … they [Whites] don’t feel what we feel. You know, for us it’s something that you have to go back in our history to understand, why we are the way we are, and sometimes a lot of Whites—. And this is something that you feel, it’s not something that you just read and understand.

Likewise, Beverly, another Canadian from the Caribbean, who has done her racial equity work both in the education system and at the community level, critiques a white colleagues’ approach to racial equity work, saying:

**Beverly:** Once we begin to see antiracism work as just paper—you know, you read about it and it’s OK. No, it’s not OK! People have to interact with people.

In each case the participant makes reference to the type of knowledge that is acquired through (ostensibly superficial, disembodied) reading, and each draws a clear distinction between this kind of knowledge and the kind of experiential knowledge that they are asserting is necessary in racial equity work. This indispensable knowledge is acquired through the personal experience of being Black in a racist society, and Keith seems to suggest that it is also acquired through an embodied collective historical memory of

---

27 Indeed, no knowledge can really be disembodied. Claiming that the body is not salient in knowing is part of the same political project as claiming to be apolitical and claiming the kind of “objectivity” that does not implicate the researcher in her research.
racial oppression that Blacks share. In other words, there is the full engagement of their embodied experience in the process of knowing.

The participants assert that books cannot fully represent the embodied knowledge of which they speak, and, therefore, that this knowledge cannot be attained simply through contemplating written documents. Such documents can only provide an approximate representation of embodied knowledge, and therefore cannot be considered to confer the embodied knowledge that Blacks have. Documents alone cannot guarantee that the reader will grapple with the text through her/his embodied experience. Indeed, Beverly tells us that the knowledge of race gained solely through written documents may be unreliable for effective racial equity work if it is not complemented with the embodied forms of knowledge that people of Colour have, and if the white racial equity worker does not also bring a particular type of experience to that knowing. She says:

**Beverly:** And I don’t believe that Whites can just go off into their own community and do antiracist work without having a true understanding of where whatever the culture is where these people are coming from. Because you can read things from books, right? But not everything you read is authentic. So the interaction, that relationship that—and when I say relationship, I’m talking about personal interaction between people—should happen. Because if you notice when I talked about Sheila Kristensen, we had a common understanding between us before all the work was done.

In her interview, Beverly speaks of traveling to the Caribbean with her white colleague, Sheila, and taking her to visit the interior of the country where a tourist might not normally go. In other words, by bringing her into close contact with people who lived race (and class) oppressions, Beverly took steps to try and bring Sheila into more than just an academic knowledge of race and racism, and thereby to offset the inaccuracies that might be gleaned from written representations of race and racism on their own. We shall see later in Section 4.4 that the participants feel that even this exposure will not
substitute for Blacks’ embodied knowledge, and certainly there is much that is problematic about this kind of race tourism and the travelogues it often produces (see Pratt, 1992). However, in limited ways, it may give access to a kind of experiential knowledge about race and racism that goes beyond academic knowledge—particularly if undertaken alongside a Black travel partner determined to point out the effects of global racial and colonial arrangements. This is a kind of knowledge that Beverly thought it was important for Sheila to have.

It is important that I note here that there is no reason to assume from the participants’ narratives that they feel that embodied knowledge of race is unrelated to what/how one can know about race academically. In fact, their position about the indispensability of this knowledge in racial equity work, academic or otherwise, would suggest the contrary. Chapter 7 takes up how this plays out for the white racial equity worker. However, the concern here is about the acquisition of knowledge. The study participants assert that there is an experiential knowledge of race and racism that Blacks acquire through the body that cannot be acquired through scholastic channels, and indeed, that even for Whites scholastic knowledge by itself is inadequate preparation for doing racial equity work.

4.4 The Question of Acquiring Embodied Race Knowledge through Association

As we saw in the previous section, it is significant that Beverly and some other participants in this study suggest that Whites who would get involved in racial equity work can acquire some of the knowledge they need for this work through interaction with the racially oppressed. This knowledge is also to some extent experiential, non-
scholastic, and in Beverly’s opinion, essential for Whites involved in racial equity work to have.

James, a government sector employee who migrated to Canada from an African nation many years ago, also sees interaction with people of Colour as a valuable experience for Whites in racial equity work. He relates:

James: Well I did actually work with one [white person] who I thought was, ah, eugh, slightly effective, because she was fairly fair, and part of the reason was this person had spent six years working in Ghana. She was married to a diplomat, a Canadian diplomat, so she lived in Ghana for six years. So she got exposed to our people. So when I came here to work with her in the other department, she found out I was from Ghana, it was very easy for her to interact with me. She was able to understand some of my concerns about racism and discrimination, and she was trying to, ah, help me implement and overcome some of those things in the department—which is good! But you see, because she had lived there, she’d had the exposure …

According to James, this woman’s effectiveness in racial equity work (relative to other white colleagues he has had) came through having lived for some time among Ghanaians in Ghana. We can presume that this experience of displacement during which at least some of the norms of white dominance to which she was accustomed in North America might have been suspended, and during which she may have been forced into more frequent interaction on equal terms with Blacks than she had been accustomed to, served to de-normalize for her the racial status quo of white dominance that she knew in Canada.

It should be clear to the reader that in the contemporary neo-colonial geopolitical climate (meaning reorganized colonial rather than post-colonial (Dei, 2006b, p. 2)), despite what many may common-sensically believe, Whites can never achieve a racial experience that is equal to that of Blacks in North America by simply moving to a country where they are a numerical minority. This is particularly so if that country is a former European colony, for in such a context the impact of colonized mentalities and
reorganized colonial relations often still promotes whiteness and European-ness as superior to Blackness and African-ness. James is therefore not saying that by living in Africa his colleague has now had the experience of being truly racially minoritized. Instead, he seems to suggest that in such a context, many of the unexamined assumptions about race and about Blacks that circulate in Euro-North America are unsettled. On the basis of this modified frame of reference, in James’s opinion, his colleague was stirred and motivated to become involved in racial equity work upon her return to Canada.

Another manner in which Whites’ association with Blacks might become preparation for racial equity work is the following which Maryam shares:

Maryam: I think what is good, [is that] people become, sometimes, an antiracist person, a very strong ally in antiracism, when they have friends around them. The white people, when that person has strong friends who are, for example, Black, and they become automatically, you know— … For them it’s, “Ah!” {snaps fingers} you know, [when] someone is racist {snaps fingers} they see the person attacking [their] friend. … when someone is racist they see those persons attacking, in their mind, attacking their friends. And, [they say] “Oh. I have Black friends. Oh no! It can’t be like this. No!”

In this case, Maryam suggests that close relationships with Blacks begin to undo some of the troubling but typical white indifference to racial injustice caused by social interaction mostly with Whites and a lack of interaction with Nonwhites—that is, “white habitus” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b, pp. 103-125; Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006). These relationships may therefore serve to improve the white body’s potential to be an ally in racial equity work. Maryam is suggesting that when Whites have these relationships with people of Colour, they develop an empathy that they may not have had before, and become more likely to respond to instances of overt racism since they are able to imagine the effects that the instance of racism might have upon their nonwhite friends or relatives.
Summarizing, then, these respondents feel that extended or intimate exposure to Blacks—either through immersion experiences in a Black context, or interaction on a personal level whereby they become acquainted with the injustices Blacks experience—can help to reorganize the dominant hegemonic ways in which Whites know and act in the world, and help them to become better allies in racial equity work.

However, we must also notice that the participants do not suggest that these white experiences of proximity to Blacks allow them to absorb Black experience, nor do they suggest that knowledge gained in this fashion can replace Blacks’ embodied understanding of race and racism. Indeed, the “qualifications” for racial equity work gained in this fashion are somewhat tenuous and do not guarantee the white body’s complete liberty from potentially performing whiteness. This is evident from the following points:

First, the language the participants use about Whites’ gaining knowledge of race and racism through these avenues is extremely indefinite. Note that James, hesitating as he said it, spoke of his colleague as being “slightly effective.” Later, he says of the same colleague:

**James:** Because she wants to *believe* that she understands [Blacks]. She wants to *believe* that she knows the difficulties they are going through. (emphasis in transcript)

And of another colleague in a similar situation:

**James:** He was *beginning* to understand what it means for us to live in his environment. (emphasis added)

Also, Beverly says:

**Beverly:** I have worked with Sheila Kristensen in fighting racism. And I think one of the things that was good is that she spent a lot of time with me asking me questions. She got to know me very well. And so it kind of, it gave her a
framework from which to start her work, because she had an idea of some of the difficulties that I experience in society as a Black person.

The tentative language exhibited in statements like “slightly effective,” “wants to believe,” “beginning to understand,” “had an idea,” seem to communicate that this epistemology of association is useful in helping Whites to become better allies in racial equity work and is an important complement to that knowledge acquired through reading, but that it neither matches Blacks’ experiential knowledge nor confers upon Whites epistemic authority in this work. Indeed, Beverly addresses the notion of white epistemic authority through engagement in racial equity work or proximity to Blacks, stating clearly:

**Beverly:** I don’t want a white person to tell me what I am or who I am. *I know* who I am, right? What I want that white person to do is to use that information about me to educate other people who are not aware of the struggles and the rest of it.

Beverly places obvious limits around what her white allies should do with the knowledge of race and racism gained through association with her, expecting them to use it to assist her in educating others about race and racism. Further, she clearly retains the epistemic salience of her own knowledge based on her direct experience of racism as a Black woman, and resists the notion that her white colleagues should be able to use this epistemology of association to claim the space to speak for her.

Similarly, James makes important distinctions between those Whites who gain some effectiveness in racial equity work through intimate association with Blacks, and those who use this experience to claim epistemic authority:

**Philip:** Ahm, but the question I wanted to ask you was, “how does that work?” Somebody who has been abroad, now, and says, “Oh well. I not only have all this training, but I also have experience living in Ghana, so I *really* have the answers,” does that happen, or, or does it really—?
James (cutting me off): No it happens all the time. But you see, there’s a difference between that and what I’m referring to. ‘Cause I speak about this woman who lived in Ghana for six years, she doesn’t say that. She doesn’t come across like she’s got all the answers for our problems. All she is saying is that she has a better understanding of our issues and the way we do business than the average Caucasian who hasn’t had that exposure. That’s one group. The other group is the people who go for—it doesn’t matter how long they go to Africa or those places—and they come back and they think they have the solutions.

Like Beverly, James is critical of those Whites who would claim epistemic authority and expertise to speak on behalf of the racially oppressed on the basis of their association with them.

To conclude this section, then, having spoken of the inadequacy of race knowledge gained through reading, the participants now speak of Whites’ being able to acquire a particular type of experiential knowledge for racial equity work through other avenues—in this case, through intimate association with Blacks. However, they do not understand this epistemology of association as equivalent to Blacks’ knowledge through the direct experience of racial oppression, nor do they understand it as affording Whites epistemic authority in racial equity work that can trump or stand in for Blacks’ embodied epistemologies.

4.5 The Question of Extrapolating to Racial Oppression from Other Oppressions

Since Blacks’ experiential knowledge of race and racism comes through the experience of oppression, the question may logically arise, in the context of this study, as to whether some Whites’ experience of other oppressions is an avenue to the kind of embodied knowledge that Blacks have about race and racism, which the participants claim is required in racial equity work. In other words, are other oppressions such as
those based on gender, class, disability and so on equivalent to racial oppression, and can the knowledge of oppression gained through those channels equal the knowledge of racism gained by experiencing racial oppression? The research participants make it clear that this is not the case. We have already heard Maryam speak of this in Section 4.2. Like her, seven of the ten participants in this study explicitly take this position, while the others imply it. Some excerpts from the interviews will draw out further aspects of this claim.

Ajani is from the Caribbean, but came to Canada at a very young age. He does his racial equity work through the medium of the arts. When asked whether Whites who live under the domination of another axis of oppression are better allies in racial equity work, Ajani says:

**Ajani:** I think that it’s an oversimplification, though I do think it is a valid point that you can use that experience to empathize with others. However, it’s not the same.

**Philip:** OK. So they’re not necessarily more effective because they have this, or they are effective with qualifications, or what?

**Ajani:** They *could* be very effective as someone in another walk of life who can kind of see through your scope through comparison, but they may very well not at all be. They may *absolutely* have no clue! ’Cause, I think then it’s a level of—potentially wisdom? Potentially experience? I don’t know. But I’m not gonna say just because you walk down my block, you saw the house that has the blue mailbox. You walked down the street! That doesn’t mean you observed every detail. You *could* have, you know, said, “Yeah, I notice that looks just like that, and that kinda makes me think—,” you know, and you could go down that line. But I’m not gonna jump that far down a conclusion to say that you’ve done that work in your mind.

To Ajani, experiences of oppression along differing axes of oppression are not identical. While the potential is there for a white person who experiences one of these other oppressions to have a greater sensitivity to racial oppression it takes wisdom and
experience on the part of that individual to be able to draw analogies that lead to a greater understanding of racial oppression. However, the individual may just as easily be incapable of drawing these analogies. It is therefore unwise to assume that this person will necessarily be a good ally in racial equity work.

Diane, who was born in Canada and does racial equity work in the academy, agrees with Ajani, saying:

**Diane:** We have a general idea about oppression, and then we have a specific idea about oppression based on the oppression or oppressions that we experience. And I wouldn’t take that away from anybody. But do I think that a white woman with disabilities understands what it’s like to be oppressed as a Black woman or even a Black woman with disabilities? No! I don’t! Do I think they can write about oppression generally? Sure! Do I think they can write or talk about oppression or white women with disabilities? Absolutely! But can they extrapolate that and then, you know, be able to develop an argument or a position about the oppression of Black women. No! I’m sorry, I don’t! And in fact I think they don’t have standing to talk for me, and I’ve said that—publicly!

Though Diane agrees that someone who has experienced oppression has the potential to be more understanding of racial oppression than someone who has not, Diane argues that there is specificity to the different oppressions that makes it impossible to simply substitute the knowledge and experience of one type of oppression for the knowledge and experience of another.

Again, Imani agrees with this position, but adds another dimension:

**Imani:** Well, it would be different with each individual. Let’s at least be hopeful enough to say that. There may be some people, and there certainly are some people, who can move from where they are to use those experiences to look at other kinds of oppression, and at least have a kind of open-mindedness, and attempt to understand or to analogize those experiences with what others are feeling. But many can’t. So very often, you find them hanging into being sensitive to those things which are *their* issues, or their particular identification points. And you find them more comfortable with that and *leaning* towards that, and *sensitive* to those. … But I really do think that you cannot assume that somebody, because they have suffered any one of the oppressions would just
automatically be able to deal with all of that group [of other oppressed people] and be better at it.

Imani not only concurs that other oppressions are not identical to racial oppression and that they do not provide an automatic window into understanding racial oppression, but she adds that Whites’ experiences of another oppression may actually serve as a hindrance to understanding racial oppression since their sensitivities may continue to be aligned solely with their own types of experiences of oppression. This significantly undermines any common-sense idea that the experience of other oppressions is somehow equivalent to racial oppression.

Further complicating the relationship of other oppressions to racial oppression, Ajani also feels that one’s racial dominance has the potential to create more of a barrier to understanding racial oppression than any simultaneous oppression has to provide access to this understanding. Thus, in reference to the white woman, who is racially dominant but also experiences gender oppression, he says:

**Ajani:** I do believe that the white male has established supremacy, but at the same time he’s also tried to pave the path for the white female, so she has a distorted view as well.

Apart from the problematic assertion in this excerpt that the white man “does for” the white woman and that her worldview is prescribed by the white man, we see Ajani drawing out the important fact that one cannot lose sight of the white woman’s positioning for racial privilege, which is as significant a part of her experience as her gender oppression. Indeed, it represents her embodied knowledge of race. So, again, her gender oppression does not automatically position her to be sensitive to racial oppression.

Therefore, speaking to the same issue, Sharon requires that a white racial equity worker will have done specific work to come to understand racial oppression. She says:
Sharon: I’m gonna start with myself before I move into trying to answer that question. I, because of the environment that I came out of, I’m a race woman. Race was really what shaped my consciousness. I never really considered gender, disability, sexuality, all of those sorts of things. That came later on. But my entry point was race. So I’ve had to learn along the way, or unlearn, some of those biases that you acquire … and, you know, you look at the world differently and you think about where you need to shift your gaze, right? So {sigh} I mean I would imagine that an ally doing antiracism work—, I’d want somebody to have that kind of awareness and that sort of consciousness about these issues. And say, for example, I was working with a white gay man as an antiracism facilitator, that person could understand oppression from where they’re located but may not necessarily be able to see the other pieces. And so I’d wanna know that the person has a sense of what those other pieces are, and would have done some work around it, the same way that I’d wanna have to do some work around those other pieces that are not my entry point.

So, according to Sharon, anyone involved in racial equity work needs to do the deliberate and intentional intellectual work of trying to gain a critical perspective on the several axes of social oppression, that is, on race, but also on other identities such as gender, class, dis/ability, and sexual identities. However, as discussed in Section 4.3, even this purposeful intellectual work cannot stand alone, but must be complemented with Blacks’ embodied knowledge of race and racism. Ajani implies this succinctly in the following exchange which follows directly from the excerpt from his interview used earlier in this section:

Ajani: But I’m not gonna jump that far down a conclusion to say that you’ve done that work in your mind.

Philip: Alright. OK. I see what you mean. So you’re saying there’s a certain amount of additional intellectual work to draw the connection. Like, the potential is there to make the connection, but you would still have to do the work of making the connection. Is that what I hear you saying?

Ajani: Yes, and even still, nothing beats experience. It’s still just an image of it.
Sharon’s position also dovetails with Ajani’s position in another respect. Shortly after the above excerpt, she also speaks to the matters of dominance and privilege for consideration in this dynamic. She says:

**Sharon:** So, just as I, as a facilitator, have a race entry point, and I know why I have a race entry point—. I am not an expert on what Black women who are lesbians experience. I’m not. I’m a heterosexual woman. I would even be reluctant to speak from the point of view of a woman who is really poor, because I can’t say that I’ve experienced extreme levels of poverty and I know where my privileges, *my* privileges lie, right? So I want somebody who is able to negotiate those sorts of things, and talk about those sorts of things, and understand where their location is, but also the limitations of their location. I want that. We have to have those kinds of conversations. So, I don’t want to set up myself as an expert on anybody’s life at all, and I need somebody who is going to work from that point of view with me in the work that we do.

Sharon appears to be making the point that for the purposes of racial equity work, it is more productive for the white person who may live oppression through an axis of identification other than race to pay attention to the ways in which s/he is privileged and attempt to unlearn her/his taken for granted dominance, than it is for her/him to focus on the ways s/he is oppressed. Dei (2006b, p. 11) has noted that we must all pay particular attention to the ways that we are privileged as we pay attention to the ways we are oppressed, though our tendency is to do the opposite.

In conclusion, we see that the participants in this study thoroughly problematize the notion that other social oppressions that Whites experience might stand in for Blacks’ racial experience in equity work, or even provide a direct, unobstructed avenue to knowledge of race and racism. They challenge the notion (seen so often in CWS third project work) that these oppressions offset racial privilege, and assert that these other oppressions may even serve to obscure one’ white privilege. What is important, then, is that Whites who would do racial equity work thoroughly examine their social positioning
as racially dominant *in spite of* any oppression they may experience along other axes. This type of examination will lead to an understanding of the ontological tentativeness and incompleteness of their knowledge in matters of race and racism, and in racial equity work in particular.

### 4.6 Further Considerations of Other Oppressions in the Racial Equity Project

Close examination of the excerpts from Diane and Sharon above draw attention to yet another dimension with regard to the interplay of other oppressions. Diane asserts that the experiences of a white woman with a disability cannot be assumed to be identical to those of a Black woman with a disability. Therefore this white woman cannot speak for the Black woman despite the fact that they are both women with disabilities. Likewise, Sharon tells us that she will not position herself as an expert on a Black lesbian’s life or on the life of an extremely poor Black woman despite the fact that she is also a Black woman. Thus, both women draw attention to an insight gleaned from non-“Western”/nonwhite feminist scholarship (see, e.g. duCille, 1994; Grillo, 1995) that one cannot essentialize the experience of an oppressed group or frame the experience of those individuals who share an oppression as though that experience were monolithic. It is important to realize that while we look at any one oppression and how it affects the lives of those who experience it, there are other axes of oppression/privilege that are not only acting simultaneously, but which significantly alter the way in which oppression is experienced. For example, Black women and Black men both experience racial oppression, but because of the way that they are differently positioned with respect to gender they experience that racial oppression in some ways that converge, but also in many ways that diverge.
Not surprisingly, two of the women raise this issue, and raise it in connection with their discussion of Whites who suffer other oppressions. For example Imani says:

**Imani:** I know that when I was involved in the teachers’ union, I did a lot of work with women, working with a lot of my colleagues who were all focusing on that, on getting women into administrative roles. … I mean, it started to open up later, but it was a lot of work. *A lot* of work. I mean, it *was* a lot of work, there’s no point denying it. And there are many, many women who still *hang* to the identification of women for various roles, and it’s still necessary to do it, I just don’t spend my *time* there anymore, you know. There are certain lessons we all learn that we may be women, but we’re not *white* women *{laughs}* and, you know, when you’re promoting women, you’re somehow promoting your closest enemy. But then the same thing happens very often with Black men—so we won’t go there either. … That’s also true of Black men who move into race relations, I mean move into equity work, not race relations. I mean I’ve heard them sort of *dismiss* the whole women’s issue, which, you know, which angers me also, because I say, “C’mon now, you can’t—. Let’s not think that the world, you know, has fought these wars because we had nothing else to do with our time.”

Imani relates that working together against an oppression is fraught with tensions created by other oppressions that are not shared. She resents her white feminist colleagues’ dismissal of racial oppression even as she resents her Black male colleagues’ dismissal of gender oppression.

Sharon expresses similar concerns about Black men who she worked with in presenting antiracism workshops:

**Sharon:** And, and it’s not just the white male. That’s my own general observation that people who do this work who are men don’t take up gender issues very well. At all! And I would have been surprised if I had come across someone who—. And, you know, like we did do antiracism training with men [as facilitators]. We would ask men to come if we had more sessions than we could take or whatever, we would ask men to do it. And men who are well respected and very good—most of them men of Colour. I don’t think we did work with white men. But I didn’t really see a checking of the sexism, you know. And you could argue that if you’re doing an antiracism workshop, the focus is different, which is true. But even in the interactions with us—.
Non-“Western” feminists have long taken exception to the totalizing discourses of white feminism and Black women have long spoken about the gender contentions between themselves and Black men in racial equity work. Agreeing with these positions, Imani and Sharon are declaring the importance of an awareness of all aspects of identity in doing equity work—even if it is specifically racial equity work. They expect that Black male colleagues in racial equity work will be mindful of the way that they are positioned differently with respect to gender, and take that into account in the working relationship. They expect this in much the same way that they expect white women colleagues in gender equity work to be mindful of the way that they are positioned differently with respect to race, and take that into account in the working relationship. If white women tend to lose sight of the “racialness” of their experience of gender (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 9), and therefore came under criticism from women of Colour, then Black men cannot afford to lose sight of the genderedness of their particular experiences of race. These observations must also be extrapolated to issues of class, race, disability, religion, and sexuality. This is certainly in keeping with the ideals of integrative antiracism and anti-colonial discursive frameworks and work. Dei (2000c, p. 31-33) speaks of the importance of considering gender and other oppressions in antiracist work, pointing to the fact that, indeed, we cannot make sense of the way racism affects certain bodies without keeping these other oppressions in view. Further, if we are to consider colonial domination to refer not only that which is “foreign or alien,” but also that which is “dominating and imposing” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 308) then clearly we cannot resist racism within an antiracist/anticolonial politics without considering its imbrication with issues of gender, class etc.
However, I think it is also important for me to cautiously point out that while paying attention to all oppressions within a racial equity endeavour is necessary and important, the notion of the salience of race (Dei, 2000c, pp. 30-31) implies that paying attention to gender dynamics between Black men and women within a racial equity endeavour cannot have identical implications to paying attention to race dynamics between Black and white people in a racial equity endeavour because in the former case, both parties are similarly located with respect to what the endeavour is challenging, while in the latter case they are not. I would argue that this is what Imani is alluding to when she corrects herself and makes the following clarification:

**Imani:** That’s also true of Black men who move into race relations, I mean move into equity work, not race relations.

And what Sharon is alluding to when she

**Sharon:** And you could argue that if you’re doing an antiracism workshop, it the focus is different, which is, which is true. But even in the interactions with us—.

Both women recognize the importance of taking seriously the gender dynamics between Black women and men who do racial equity work together (and by extension other equity dynamics among Blacks doing racial equity work together), but this is not to be done in a manner that renders the racial equity project ineffective by losing sight of the racial equity objective. This, indeed, is the danger of what Imani is calling “equity work” (in contrast to “race relations” work) and what others call anti-oppression work. The anti-oppression approach has a tendency to have a broad focus on anything that might be considered oppression—certainly class, disability, gender, race, religion, sexuality, language, but also body size, age, family status, political affiliation, generational status, “speciesism,” and “haterism” (Rainforest Action Network, 2008; see also Dominick &
Ebrahimi, 2007; Family Service Association of Toronto, 2006). It quickly becomes difficult to make this list a finite one, and frankly there are parts of the list that it is difficult to take seriously! While we must keep in view the fact that systems of domination interlock and create each other (Dei, 2000c, pp. 31-33; Razack, 2005), and that a commitment to addressing any one of these suggests a commitment to opposing all injustice, one can easily appreciate that the attempt to address all of these matters simultaneously, as is often the spirit, intent, and politics of anti-oppression discourses and endeavours, is likely to result in a failure to address any of them effectively.

With respect to this anti-oppression stance, the salience of race within antiracist/anticolonial work also requires that while we take a principled stand against any domination or unwarranted imposition, we also consider the different degrees of severity (Dei, 2008a, pp. 18-19). All are unacceptable. However, some involve more dire ramifications, consequences, and threat to life-chances than others. We only trivialize oppressions that seriously limit individuals’ life chances by holding them at the same level as those that only create inconvenience. Further, it is difficult not to see anti-oppression initiatives as part of an oxymoronic project to secure everyone a place on the margins.

To conclude this section then, and to return specifically to the issue of epistemic salience in racial equity work, we have already clearly seen the participants’ objection to Whites claiming epistemic experience in racial equity work. However, we also understand that individual Blacks cannot presume to claim epistemic authority of race in a manner that positions them to speak for other individual Blacks about the particularities of their experience—particularly if they are differently located with respect to other axes
of social oppression. I am quite aware of my need to be watchful about this as a non-disabled, Black, middle-class, heterosexual man. Nevertheless, Blacks can certainly claim community and coalition within racial equity work in terms of a shared history, collective memory, and overlapping experience. Such a community politics requires “engaging communities across difference” (Dei, 2008a, p. 19) and implies an orchestrating of the various Black experiential as well as antiracist academic frames in order to generate a powerful Black cry of resistance. The image is one of a roaring crowd, consisting, indeed, of many distinct individual voices, but voices that speak together in a unified, unmistakeable demand for racial justice and the toppling of white supremacy.

4.7 Balancing Black Experiential Knowledge

Thus far in this chapter, I have argued that the participants in this study feel strongly that there is an experiential knowledge of race and racism that Blacks have that is essential in racial equity work. Whites cannot acquire this knowledge that Blacks have through scholastic endeavours, through close association with Blacks, or through the experience of other oppressions.

However, the participants do not speak of this experiential knowledge in ways that exclude and disdain non-embodied forms of knowledge acquired through more extensively theorized propositional epistemologies and scholastic endeavours. Indeed, they speak cautiously about assuming that the “epistemic saliency of the subordinated [Black] voice” (Dei, 2006b, p. 11) in racial equity work comes on the basis of racial identification or embodied experience alone. We see this in the following excerpt where Imani speaks of the attitude with which some organizations hire individuals to job
positions with a racial equity mandate. Imani says that this is often done though a politics of tokenism whereby anybody regarded as racially/ethnically nonwhite is considered for the position, with no attention at all paid to her/his critical race acumen.

**Imani:** It may be a Jew, but it can’t be any Jew, no more than it can be any Black. You see, all of a sudden it becomes quick and dirty. “Oh. We need somebody Jewish, or let’s find somebody Black, Chinese, Japanese, Jewish. Let’s just find them. Let’s find them. And then we’ve got somebody there.” Well then when you do that, you know what you say to me? You say to me, “This job has to be done. It’s not really very important. I gotta get somebody who looks like they’re doing the job in the role, and I don’t really give a damn.” Because if I had 15 Black people apply for the job, 22 Chinese, 87 Whites, I don’t care. I’m gonna go through this to see what skills do they bring to the job. And yet this very same quick and dirty identification is effected by people who say, “I wanna get the best person for the job.” And I look at them and I say, “Well, you know, obviously you’re not doing it too well.”

In this excerpt, Imani speaks to the kind of careful consideration that needs to be given to the qualifications of individuals desiring to do racial equity work. Not anyone can do this work, and the work requires certain skills and qualifications. While, on the one hand, Imani says elsewhere in her interview that in terms of their understanding of race, it is an advantage to have Nonwhites in these types of racial equity positions, on the other hand, she also does not feel that this work should always fall to Blacks or other people of Colour and never to Whites. Nor does she feel that Blacks are incontentastably qualified for these positions on the basis of their racial identification alone.

James, who has not only been hired to a position with responsibility for ensuring racial equity in his organization, but who is also responsible for hiring to these kinds of positions, is also very wary of this tokenism. As he discusses it, he refers both to his own racial equity position as well as his responsibility to hire others to do the same work:

**James:** My emphasis is on really on 2 things:
1. the effectiveness of the person who is the leader and
2. having the necessary qualifications and experience to do the work
I’m not saying at all that simply because of the fact that you are dealing with, for example, visible minorities, we have to have a Black person there or, you know, visible minority there. The person has to be qualified—must have the right experience. I’ll give you another example. When I got here, they all heard I was, you know, I was Black. It’s a Black man coming. So, the initial reaction was, “Aw, gee, you know. They are trying to fill the quota.” And I really did not care, so when I met with the group the very first day, I sat them down for fifteen minutes, and I talked to them about my background and my experiences.

So I said, “Well do you guys have any questions?”

And he said, “Yes!” One guy said, “Yes. We are so glad to see you are here. You obviously are very well qualified. You’ve got a lot of experience, so we are willing to work with you.” And to me that was very important. It was important for them to understand that I didn’t come here simply because of the colour of my skin. I’m here because of my experience and my qualifications. I can do the job. Period! And that’s what I’m talking about. But it’s a plus if the person can do the job with the experience and qualifications, and also is part of that group. But it is a disadvantage if you’re not part of that group and you have to go and deal with our people. That’s what I’m saying.

Like Imani, James values the embodied knowledge that Blacks bring to racial equity work, but insists on the necessity of having other qualifications in place as well.

It is also clear from the foregoing excerpts, that neither James nor Imani is presuming to bar Whites from doing racial equity work. Certainly, there is no contradiction involved with holding both that Blacks have a form of embodied knowledge that is indispensable to racial equity work at the same time as one insists that Whites are also able to, indeed obligated to, be involved in the work. What the participants do seem to be saying is that the single most important qualification for this kind of work is a critical understanding of how race and racism script the social text, and, of course, this makes perfect sense.

Thus, the comparison being made when we speak of Black epistemological authority in racial equity work is not between Whites in general and Blacks in general, but rather between Whites and Blacks who have each acquired some form of critical perspective on racial inequity that brings them to racial equity work. By extension, the
suggestion would be that if in selecting someone to do racial equity work, one had to make the choice (and one seldom does) between a Black person with no critical race understanding and a white person with a critical race understanding, the white person would be a better choice. This does not undermine the importance of Blacks’ embodied knowledge, and it would certainly be a rare occasion—possibly betraying a lack of good faith on the part of the one hiring or seeking to fill a racial equity position—in which one would be forced to make that kind of choice. It also needs to be noted that there may be situations in which Whites may be strategically chosen for these jobs in order to mitigate the assumption (to which many of the participants object) that racial equity is the concern only of Blacks and other people of Colour. It is worth reiterating, however, that those Whites who would be involved in racial equity work must also have that critical race knowledge and an understanding of how they are implicated in the racial landscape. This involves a particular way of working with their own embodiedness in white supremacist society (which will be discussed fully in Chapter 7). On this point, Diane says:

**Diane:** Ahm, well, if there is a track record, I’d want to know that. I’d want to know what the person’s level of consciousness was about racism, about their own either subconscious, or even conscious knowledge about racism and what they’ve done or may do in the future. And I would want an acknowledgement, I think, that they are not the experts, OK? I want that up front. And once I have that, then I can actually work with those people *(laughs)*.

Here, Diane connects the white person’s understanding of the workings of racism with an awareness of the epistemological salience of Blackness. She requires evidence of both before she feels comfortable doing racial equity work with a white colleague.

Thus, the participants are not claiming an absolute epistemic authority based solely upon being Black. In other words, it is not epistemic salience itself that Blacks embody, but rather a particular embodied experiential connection to the work which when present
alongside a critical perspective on race and racism, generates that salience. In other words, we might say that Black experiential knowledge of race can only be made fully operational through a critical consciousness. In any case, there is an important connection between a critical consciousness and the embodied knowledge of race and racism. They are mutually constitutive, and it does not seem that one can develop the one without the other. Black experiential knowledge that is truly embodied must be critical. This will be discussed more fully in Section 4.9.

In summary, then, both Blacks and Whites have access to critical knowledge and a critical stance on race and racism—one acquired through (not necessarily academic) contemplation—and this knowledge is an obvious pre-requisite qualification for anyone choosing to do racial equity work though it is come at differently. Indeed, Sharon makes it clear that good intentions and warm feelings are not enough:

**Sharon:** Those are the sorts of things that I look for, you know, if I were to interview somebody, a white person, to work with me on a project. … You’re doing the work; I am assuming that you’re coming in because you’ve got an understanding. And the reason why it’s important for me that people know that is because there is a perception that anybody can do antiracism work? That it’s not a skill. It’s not something that you have to go and learn. Right? I spent years learning this, and I don’t know everything, right? And I want to know that you’ve done that kinda work, you know? And if you haven’t done that kinda work then you and I can’t talk. Because I don’t want you to feel, “Oh. Well I’m gonna do this because it sounds like a great idea, sounds like a good thing to do, and maybe I can learn something from you as a Black woman in doing it. Uh uh!

However, the particular way that Blacks are able to embody critical knowledge is the basis of the epistemic salience of the Black racial equity worker’s knowledge in racial equity work.

As a final note in this section, it is necessary to emphasize that the notion of Black embodied knowledge does not suggest that Whites should not do racial equity work, or
that they can never comprehend racism, but rather that Whites should be aware of the “epistemic advantage” (Narayan, 1989) of Nonwhites in this work and of their own “epistemic disadvantage” (Howard, 2008, p. 30) and allow this to shape their engagement in racial equity work. Narayan writes:

The view that we can understand much about the perspectives of those whose oppression we do not share allows us the space to criticize dominant groups for their blindness to the facts of oppression. The view that such an understanding, despite great effort and interest, is likely to be incomplete or limited, provides us with the ground for denying total parity to members of a dominant group in their ability to understand our situation. (1989, p. 265).

In other words, the notion of the epistemic salience of the nonwhite voice should inspire pause and humility for the white racial equity worker without causing a sense of paralysis or disengagement.

4.8 Significance of Black Experiential Knowledge in Racial Equity Work

Having argued in the preceding sections of this chapter for Blacks’ embodied knowledge of race and racism, this section will address the significance of this knowledge and its practical implications in racial equity work.

I begin with what these implications are not. Many scholars have taken issue with the problematic “storytelling” (Srivastava, 2005, p. 275) methodology that has been used in some racial equity work, and which expects participants of Colour in racial equity workshops to share their life-stories and personal encounters with racism with a view toward educating or sensitizing the white participants in the workshop (Srivastava, 2005). This approach is rooted in a misguided multiculturalism paradigm (Srivastava, 2005, pp. 290-292), is coercive (Srivastava, 2005, p. 287), involves considerable risks and hazards for the nonwhite participants (Bannerji, 1991; Srivastava, 2005, p. 287), depends upon
and reinforces inequitable relations of race (Bannerji, 1991; Howard, 2006; Srivastava, 2005) and is therefore non-performative or counterproductive (Srivastava, 2005).

In this study, the participants’ assertion of the pivotal import of Blacks’ embodied experience in racial equity work has nothing to do with the “storytelling” (Srivastava, 2005, p. 275) paradigm. Instead, the participants seem to suggest that Black embodied knowledge plays a central role in recognizing and delineating the racism against which the political project is directed in the first place, and in the formulating of responses and solutions to racism. They contend that their critical knowledge of race that they have acquired, along with their experiential knowledge arising from inhabiting a Black body in racist society, position them to recognize racism when white bodies sometimes might not, and therefore to have valuable input when crafting responses to it.

We have already heard Terrence speak about the differing ways in which the same racial circumstances can be understood by those who are located differently with respect to race.

**Terrence:** … for somebody who has never, ever, experienced the kind of thing you’ve experienced, they don’t understand the nuance. They don’t understand that I can go to the health club with them, and they’re standing by my side, and they feel perfectly fine, and I feel excluded. And even if I was to turn to them and say, “This isn’t a place that I wanna be,” they more than likely would look at me and say, “Why not?” The fact that you cannot see it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. And that person cannot see it. I can.

In this excerpt, Terrence mentions the feelings of exclusion that he feels—in this case, in a social setting, the health club. He addresses the fact that his white co-workers would be unable to perceive any reason for Terrence to feel discomfort as they feel none themselves. However, it is important to note that Terrence is not simply chalkling this up to individual idiosyncrasies that might determine one’s personal preferences and comfort.
level in a social setting. Rather, he locates the problem in an external racial dynamic that impinges upon him differently than it does upon his white co-workers—a dynamic that he is able to discern while they cannot. Where Terrence says, “the fact that you cannot see it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist,” also alludes to the contestations about the existence of the dynamic that might ensue between him and his white co-workers. Maryam refers to a similar situation:

**Maryam:** And then sometimes, people have a little attitude toward you, and the [white] person who is with you might never catch it. Me, I have experienced situations where I was a victim of racism and my [white] colleagues would swear that it was not racism.  
*Translated from French*

In this instance, Maryam refers to the subtle, off-hand expressions of racism that Blacks and other people of Colour regularly have to endure. Again, Maryam’s white acquaintances have difficulty picking up the subtlety and nuance of these kinds of instances, and by implication, it would seem that these Whites are often unable to recognize any but the most blatant interpersonal expressions of racism, such as the use of racial epithets. Like Terrence, Maryam draws our attention to the disputations that occur over whether a particular incident that occurs is racism or not. Not only is there a clear difference of perception, but a debate generally ensues where Blacks are interrogated about the validity of their readings of these incidents and social situations, and by extension, about the existence and nature of the racism problem in the first place.

Maryam also makes the connection between embodied knowledge and the “epistemic advantage” (Narayan, 1989, p. 265) in reading these subtleties that it affords. To elaborate, in close proximity to her comparison of differences in racial experiences to sex-based differences in experience, Maryam says:
Maryam: When you have the deep understanding, you can develop a kind of savoir faire, how to do, you know. But if you don’t have—. You know there are some hidden messages, and as Black people we are so familiar with the hidden messages, and a white woman is not victim of those hidden—. I have heard a lot of speech about that, but there are hidden messages that you feel.

For Maryam, this “deep understanding” is rooted in the body through experience. She reiterates here some of the arguments that have gone before in the chapter—that a white person’s other oppressions do not equip her/him to recognize the contours, extent, and everydayness of the racism that Blacks experience; and that the Black racial equity worker’s knowledge of this is not simply cerebral, but is something visceral.

James brings together the threads of this discussion, saying:

James: If you are Black, it’s a lot easier to recognize those subtleties. If you’re white, you’re never gonna pick that up because you just think that—, you think of a million-and-one reasons why those things are happening not because of the colour. And first hand experience explains that. I was talking to a good friend of mine who’s white, happens to be white. We were having lunch the other day and we just drifted into the issue of racism in the city, and he says, “Ah, James, tell me. Have you really experienced any racism here since you’ve been here?”

And I said, “Well, Tony, you know, what you’re saying is actually nonsense because I live it everyday.”

He said, “Well what do you mean?”

I said, “Well, if I go to the drugstore to buy a box of Kleenex, I experience it. When I’m driving on the road, I experience it. When I come to work I experience it.”

“Oh. Well what do you mean?” So I went into details and explained several of the situations to him.

He said, “Well, I do experience similar things too, but I just thought the people were being very rude to me.

I said, “No, no. It’s easy for you to say that, but if you were getting into that kind of situation on a daily basis, I don’t think you’re gonna say that all these people in Canada are being rude to you. Tony, you don’t experience it every day. I do! {Striking the table} I just do!”

Once again, James testifies to his white friend’s ignorance about the racism he experiences and its pervasiveness. However, James explicitly points to something that Terrence and Maryam have, until now, only implied. Terrence and Maryam have so far
emphasized Whites’ inability to perceive the racism that they, as victims of it, see so easily. In the above excerpt, James makes it clear that this is not exclusively a failure of perception, but also a failure of hermeneutics. In other words, even when the racial effect is quite clear, it is explained away as “anything but race” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b, p. 62) such that racist manifestations are attributed to any myriad of other causes but the racism which seems the most obvious explanation. In another excerpt, Maryam offers another example which she draws from the logic behind the “War on Terror”:

**Maryam:** One of the things, I’m taking an example of the events in our times right now. When I discuss with my white friends and told them, “You know, there is a kind of white supremacy thing in the way that the USA and the Anglo Saxon axis of evil in Canada, in Australia, UK, and in USA are dealing with the rest of the world. You can see there is a kind of white supremacy reaction to the development of other areas like China, Brazil,” those people are shocked!

“How can you say that there is a white supremacy?”

I told them, “You know, it’s clear! Why are they shooting everybody who is not white? They are committing war crimes everywhere in the world. Why is it OK to punish someone who is from Africa who has killed maybe 100 persons, and why don’t you punish the president of USA who is killing, who is committing mass murder?”

So they [say], “Aw, [the president is] a stupid guy, but it’s not a white supremacy thing.”

James and Maryam point out that even when their white friends have evidence of racially inequitable circumstances or occurrences, they contest the suggestion that this could have anything to do with race. This points, then, to a “white racial illiteracy” (Kempf, 2008, p. 96. See also Guinier, 2004)(Guinier, 2004). It is an ignorance of the ontology of racism, and an inability or resistance to apply the kinds of logic that they would normally apply in other circumstances to situations that have to do with race. That is, they display an inability or resistance to recognize and read racial incidents, and an ignorance of the pervasiveness of the racism that structures the everyday. Indeed, this would entail the white counterpart embodied knowledge to Black embodied knowledge. It is this “not-
knowing” rooted in the white body’s experience of normalized racial privilege, which some scholars have referred to as “white habitus” (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Messner, 2000) and others as the “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills, 1997, p. 18). This is the dynamic to which Sharon refers when she says:

**Sharon:** From my own location I see things, and I know other Black people see things, and we have very similar types of conversations, and we have insight. So I just think that our experiences prepare us to see things in the world differently… I do believe that we have a sense when something is off, and when it’s related to our race. *{slowly}* Ahm, I’m not so sure I’m convinced that white people have that same kind of insight because they’re differently located. And I think that the kind of privilege that they have, the world is organized not to see certain things, or to justify it, or rationalize it when they do see it, you know?

Sharon, like James, refers to Whites’ tendency to rationalize away racism even when it happens right before their eyes. Society is structured in such a way that racism is business as usual—ubiquitous, and simply the way things are.

Dominant ideologies conspire with the social institutions that disseminate them to seduce us all into accepting racism as normal such that we are not outraged by it when we see it. They are complicit in the project of preventing us all from coming to counter-hegemonic understandings of the racial reality within which we live. However, as Sharon explains, the body, through the way it is taken up within a racist society, is a crucial consideration with respect to acquiring a critical race consciousness. Members of dominant groups can, particularly because of their socialization patterns, conceivably live their entire lives without necessarily having experiences that might disrupt these dominant understandings of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006). On the other hand, those who are targeted by racist discourses and institutions are positioned by their bodies to have experiences which would challenge them to become critical of dominant understandings and to re-organize their knowledge of their social worlds in counter-
hegemonic ways. While there is no guarantee that this re-organization will indeed occur for the Black body—and there are certainly many Blacks for whom it has not occurred (Dei, 2008c, p. 25)—the conditions are certainly in place to make it more likely for them than for Whites to progress toward critical understandings (Narayan, 1989, p. 264). Thus, we might say that bodies are positioned in the racial landscape such that the Black body is an epistemological and pedagogical site for its own (not others’) critical race knowledge and hermeneutics, while the white body is a potential barrier to the same.

When we recall from Section 3.1.6 that the participants hesitate to make clear distinctions between the critical race competence of Whites involved in racial equity and those who are not, we can conclude that even for Whites involved in racial equity work, this interrelationship between critical race competence and the body positioned for privilege is not easily escaped. It is not too surprising, then, that the societal debates about the ontology of race and racism sometimes enter into racial equity work. The participants in this study suggest that Blacks embodied knowledge is crucial to recognizing manifestations of racism and thus getting a fuller picture of the nature of the beast that is being challenged.

4.9 Theoretical Discussion of Embodied Racial Knowledge

I use the final section of this chapter for a theoretical elaboration and analysis of the Black embodied knowledge and epistemology of which the participants in this study speak. In so doing, I weave the empirical insights that have been discussed in this chapter with some of the theoretical work that addresses race-based epistemology.
Feminist scholars have long advanced the notion of a standpoint epistemology—the notion that one’s gender location generates one’s understanding of society. Non-“Western” feminists, Afrocentrists, critical race theorists, and white feminists interested in race have extended this understanding to embrace all aspects of social location including race (e.g., Asante, 1987, 1991; Delgado, 1989; Morrison, 1992; Narayan, 1989). However, the claim for a standpoint and situated knowledge does not explicitly imply an embodied knowledge of the type that the participants in this study assert. Thus, in this study it is important to speculate theoretically about the nature of the type of knowledge about which the participants speak, to establish how this epistemology is different from more frequently theorized epistemologies of knowledge, and to theorize the processes by which the Black body produces this kind of embodied knowledge within a racially inequitable context. Further, given the clear relationship between this embodied knowledge and a critical perspective on race and racism, it is important to examine its relationship to a liberatory consciousness and, by extension, its place in racial equity work.

4.9.1 Objectivist vs. Subjectivist Accounts of Race (Alcoff, 2001)

Since the debunking of the notion of race as biology, many scholars have set themselves to theorizing relations of race in ways that will take into account its contextual and non-essential meanings without dismissing or underestimating its real, material effects (Dei, 1996b, 1999; Lopez, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1993, 1994). Many of these efforts have consisted of historical and legal analyses of processes of racialization (e.g. Brodkin, 1998; Goldberg, 1993; Harris, 1993; Ignatiev, 1995; Lopez, 1996; Roediger, 1991). These works have been extremely important in establishing the
structural dimensions of race, particularly of whiteness, and in describing the macro-sociological processes that constitute racial identities. However, other scholars have pointed out that these accounts of race are “objectivist,” “third person” accounts of race that do not pay sufficient attention to micro-sociological dimensions and the way that race is lived (Alcoff, 2001). Other accounts of race have placed great emphasis on the semiotic and discursive dimensions of race (e.g. Hall in Jhally, 1997), again not accounting for the lived dimensions of racial phenomena (Mahendran, 2007).

Therefore, yet other work has sought to establish “subjectivist” (Alcoff, 2001) accounts of race that incorporate the important lived dimension. However, interestingly enough, much of this scholarly attention has been paid to the lived experience of whiteness as a racial identity (e.g. Chambers, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Hartigan, 1997; 2003; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000; Wray & Newitz, 1997). The perhaps inadvertent negative consequence of this is that the resulting theoretical understandings of lived whiteness, emerging as part of the necessary project of establishing whiteness as a racial identity, have often been misapplied to all lived experiences of race. However, as the participants in this study clearly assert, the lived experience of racial dominance—particularly its shifting and contingent nature—is necessarily qualitatively different from that of the lived experience of racial oppression. Theorizing the lived experience of racial oppression is important in that the objectivist theories of race emphasize its contingency and the manner in which its meaning shifts and changes, but fail to adequately address the way that racisms still act in surprisingly predictable ways to indict the usual suspects and entrench white supremacy (see Howard, 2004, p. 66). Whiteness shifts, changes, and adjusts precisely to hold in place its privilege and power. Thus the
malleability and adaptability of racial identities and boundaries actually secure and stabilize the overall social and historical functions of white racism (Howard 2006, p. 48). Objectivist accounts of race miss the intimately lived aspects of this experience, while accounts of whiteness misunderstand them.

On the other hand, scholarly writings that emerged during the intense period of global decolonization and national movements did much of the necessary theorizing of the subjective experience of racial oppression. Unfortunately, however, these have too often been recklessly accused of essentialism and have been too hastily abandoned. Subjectivist accounts of racial oppression, in the present historical juncture, then, are occupied with the task of reasserting and reclaiming the insights of this earlier era, establishing the space for understandings of race and racial experience out of which can emerge a liberatory epistemology of race. Such an approach contrasts the preoccupation with the discursive “(re)presentation of race,” the meaning of which shifts considerably over time, with the comparatively stable “presentation of race” (Mahendran, 2007, p. 192) corresponding to Fanon’s “fact of blackness” (Fanon, 1967, pp. 109-140) and his notion of the “racial-epidermal schema” (p. 112)—that is, the salience of “show[ing] up as Black in an anti-Black world” (Mahendran, 2007, p. 192). This phenomenon suggests a profoundly embodied notion of race.

4.9.2 Theorizing Black Embodied Knowledge

How, then, might we theorize this embodied knowledge and thereby establish an epistemology of race through the body without resorting to biological notions of race? If, as the participants assert, this knowledge is not equivalent to “book” knowledge, it is
clear that it is not a form of propositional knowledge, but is, rather, non-propositional, falling into the category of “implicit understanding” (Shotwell, 2006). Shotwell describes the distinction:

The term “nonpropositional” sets itself immediately against the term “propositional”—it is what the propositional is not. “Propositionality,” here, names claim-making activity; to put something propositionally is to put it in a linguistically intelligible form that could be evaluated as true or false. “Implicit understanding” names our background, taken-for-granted understanding of being in the world; the implicit is what makes things make sense to us. The implicit provides the framework through which it is possible to form propositions and also to evaluate them as true or false. While there is reason to consider implicit understanding a form of knowledge, it may not be verifiable in the same way as propositional knowledge. (pp. 3-4)

Implicit knowledge of race, or perhaps more accurately racially implicit knowledge, would therefore provide the backdrop against which propositional knowledge about race may be formed (see also Babbitt, 1996, p. 50). Indeed, the meanings that are associated with the Black body, whether by the inhabitant of that body or those who look on, fit this category of implicit knowledge inasmuch as such meanings do not arise out of attempts to organize what is seen; rather, it is the presentation of the Black body that organizes what is known (Alcoff, 2001, pp. 275-276; Butler, 1993). In other words, race is imbricated in perception, and preempts claim-making activity, in ways that radically mediate the process of knowing (Butler, 1993). This corresponds in many respects to dominant racialized common sense (Thompson, 1997, p. 17; see also Howard, 2008, pp. 26-30). In fact, I suggest that the Black experiential knowledge that the participants speak about, and dominant racialized common sense are the two varieties of embodied knowledges that Black and white racial equity workers bring to their work and have to work through. I argue that the embodied knowledge of race that the study participants
speak of is a liberatory counterpart in nonwhite bodies of dominant common sense that stands in opposition to this dominant racialized common sense. It is a form of implicit knowledge, and is, itself, “pre-reflective and pre-linguistic” (Mahendran, 2007, p. 193).

We might also say that the embodied knowledge of which the participants speak is a form of indigenous knowledge. Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg define indigenous knowledge as “a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place” (2000, p. 6; see also Dei 2000b, p. 114). The body as place or space is under-theorized. However, if we are to hold that the body is indeed place, then there is a form of indigenous knowledge arising from the enduring experience of inhabiting the Black body over time. This definition and understanding accomplish two things. First, they define this knowledge as unique to the Black body and inaccessible to the white body inasmuch as the Black body and white body cannot be understood as co-terminous social space in racially inequitable society. Second, it introduces the aspect of time which provides room for a (not necessarily linear) process of coming to liberatory consciousness. Integrating the time factor, and allowing for a coming to liberatory consciousness over time while inhabiting the Black body staves off understandings of the embodied knowledge of which I speak as somehow genetically determined. In other words, this knowledge is not innate in the sense of being rooted in biology, but rather arises out of social experiences that accumulate over time and that are related to inhabiting the Black body in the particular context of white supremacy. If this is the case, then for some the development of this knowledge may begin at birth or soon after if one is born into a white supremacist society. However, for others moving for the first time from a context that is less overtly white supremacist into one that is more so will throw
these processes into action giving rise to the jarring experience of receiving a newly significant form of embodied knowledge of race. Fanon describes such an experience of “meet[ing] the white man’s eyes” for the first time (1967, p. 110). He follows on to describe how a “racial epidermal schema” then comes over him—that is, he becomes aware of the manner in which his body in the white supremacist context always already invokes upon its surface the cumulative meanings of a long history of racist discourse which he calls the “historico-racial schema” (pp. 111-112). Fanon now knows race and racism in an embodied way that is more than (yet complements) the intellectual understanding he had before (p. 110). I note here, however, that this racial epidermal schema only establishes the ground for an oppositional Black embodied knowledge of race and racism. It does not on its own mean that this knowledge is liberatory, for the moving to the more overt white supremacist context only represents the genesis of the kind of embodied knowledge of which the participants in this study speak.

What, then, are the possible effects of this racial epidermal schema in the white supremacist context over time? Fanon speaks of being woven “by the white man [sic] … out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (1967, p. 111), and this generates a self-knowledge that attempts to impose itself from without. However, as Alcoff writes, the “near incommensurability between first person experience and historico-racial schema disenables equilibrium” (2001, pp. 274-275). There is a constant dissonance between the racialized identity generated from without and one’s personal conviction of her/his own personhood. This requires resolution, which may occur either in favour of the historico-racial schema and the rejection of one’s own full humanity, or through believing and accepting one’s full humanity and rejecting the historico-racial schema and its
implications. Memmi refers to these two possibilities as the two answers of the colonized (1969, p. 119). I suggest that the embodied Black liberatory knowledge or consciousness of which the participants in this study speak is born in the moment that the Black subject resolves the dissonance in favour of her full humanity. Memmi writes:

… assimilation being abandoned, the colonized’s [or racially oppressed’s] liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity … the colonizer’s rejection is the indispensable prelude to self-discovery. (p. 128).

Babbit (1996) discusses Christian’s analysis of a passage in *The Colour Purple* where this kind of self discovery occurs. After being accused of being “nothing at all” because of the social categories with which she is identified—that is, because she is Black, poor, and a woman—the character Celie responds, “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook. … But I’m here” (p. 50). As Babbitt argues, it is the fact of Celie’s being, and her insistence upon it in spite of the fact that she is read by others to be nothing at all, that represents a particular kind of non-propositional oppositional knowledge. This germ of liberatory knowledge is rooted in her being, yet may be extra-linguistic because of the inadequacy of existing dominant meanings and discourse to reconcile her race and gender with full humanity—that is to conceptualize Celie as fully human (p. 51). While, in the implicit dimension of knowledge, the dominant subject stalls at this impasse having no embodied conviction against dominant assertions, the oppressed subject who has decided that her answer will confirm her humanity knows in implicit ways that surmount and challenge dominant knowledge systems and systems of oppression (see also Dei, 2008c, p. 79). I quote Babbitt here at length:

Because Celie knows that she, as an African-American woman, *does* exist as a person, she is not only in a position to identify this inadequacy [of dominant knowledge]; if she proceeds, in acting and interpreting her life, *assuming* this
knowledge of her existence, she will be able to identify even more inadequacies in the dominant conceptual framework ... . Thus Celie’s being who she is is epistemically significant for one thing because her proceeding as she is, her acting and deliberating as a full person, both presupposes and requires the development of explanatory resources that constitute or can constitute a more appropriate evaluative (theoretical) perspective.

Celia’s coming to be able to think properly about her life, at least to be able to think about her life as a full human being, depends in part on personal developments, on the bringing about—through commitments and personal relations—of a critical perspective that at the least acknowledges her existence. To the extent that Celie’s personal struggle explains her coming to know certain things and that struggle itself is explained by feelings and intuitions she acquires as a result of her situation, Celie’s feelings and intuitions are epistemically significant. Indeed, in this kind of case, namely, one in which her intuitions provide perhaps the only possible access to knowledge, Celie’s intuitions would appear to constitute understanding—a reliable guide to more accurate beliefs and a basis for deliberation and action. (pp. 51-52, emphasis in original)

Note from this excerpt a number of ideas that fit perfectly with the type of knowledge being suggested by the participants in this study, and with the ideas I have been advancing in this section:

1) This liberatory embodied knowledge is not given simply because one is Black, for the racialized body “may not necessarily be working with embodied knowing” (Dei, 2008c, p. 25). Instead, the knowledge is dependent upon the racially oppressed individual’s experiencing a dissonance between her/his first person knowledge of herself/himself as human and the imposed racial epidermal schema. It is further dependent upon the Black subject’s decision to assert her/his full humanity in opposition to the dehumanizing historico-racial schema, suggesting that the subject has embarked upon a journey of self-reclamation. As Dei asserts, “it is the embodiment of knowledge that propels us to act upon our received knowledge” (Dei, 2008c, p. 73) and thus, possessing embodied knowledge of race and racism and engagement in an antiracist politics are dialectical processes. This may explain why this embodied knowledge is so
salient to these Black racial equity workers, while it is untenable to assume, on the basis of the Black body, that every Black subject lives a liberatory Black politics. The racial equity role would either be attractive to the Black subject who is developing such a liberatory consciousness, or else would strongly provoke the development of such a consciousness that would be hard to resist within such a context.

2) This liberatory embodied knowledge is embodied in that it originates within the experience of inhabiting a Black body within the racist context. For those who inhabit it, the Black body is an epistemological and pedagogical site for comprehending race and racism, and, therefore, this knowledge cannot be possessed in the same way by the racially dominant body. This embodied knowledge provides a particular sensitivity for detecting manifestations of racism because of the way racism works against the expression of the subject’s humanity.

3) It is pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic, and therefore non-propositional.

4) This knowledge is indispensable in racial equity work, but does not stand on its own. The embodied liberatory knowledge is well suited to recognizing its negation, to envisioning what full humanity, and therefore liberation, might look like, and also to making decisions about what action might be taken to achieve it. The intractability of racism, despite efforts to simply unthink it, points not only to the deep structural roots of racism such that we cannot simplistically construe racism as irrational behaviour (Goldberg, 1993, p. 120), but it also points to the importance of this embodied dimension of knowledge that can be brought to racial equity work by those bodies who live the oppressions of racism. As Mahendran asserts:

If race and racism were simply ideas and ideologies it should stand that we could rationally rethink our way out of it but, as I argue, racial perception is implicated
at a more fundamental level of who we are and how we experience the world. (2007, p. 194)

Therefore, propositional knowledge (which the participants call book knowledge) and discursive, third person analyses of race and racism are inadequate on their own.

Commenting on Fanon’s account of moving from an entirely academic, though critical, understanding of racism to one supplemented by experience, Mahendran posits:

What Fanon reveals here is that even though he had an objective and critical view of racism once he experienced racial discrimination in the flesh, intellectualist accounts of racism in no way prepared him for the subjective experience. Its [sic] seems that Fanon doesn’t necessarily jettison an objective account of racism but more importantly that the objective general account needs the subjective individual account in order to get a comprehensive interpretation of racism(s). (Mahendran, 2007, p. 195, emphasis in original)

Diane adeptly sums up the importance of Blacks’ embodied knowledge of race and its place in racial equity work undertaken by Blacks in collaboration with Whites. She says:

Diane: … if we’re talking about the Black community, or if we’re talking about the oppression or racism [toward] Black people, I am the expert, and it doesn’t matter whether I’ve written one word about it, I have that experience. So, when you tell me, for example, that this is not an instance of racism, and I differ with you, I’m the expert, because I’ve experienced it. I know what it is. You should know what it is because your group does it, but sometimes you don’t {laughs}. So … if you’re talking about the oppression of Asians of Black people, they are the people who actually know what that feels like and what it looks like, and they quite often have the solutions to it.
CHAPTER 5
WHITENESS OPENS DOORS: INVOLVING WHITENESS IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

5.1 Introduction

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the participants in this study lay claim to an embodied knowledge that when combined with critical rational knowledge, gives rise to Black epistemological authority in racial equity work—an authority that Whites cannot have or claim because of how their bodies position them differently on the racial landscape.

However, the participants in this study simultaneously claim that there are many reasons that Whites should be involved in racial equity work as Whites, and statements of this nature make up the second largest thematic category in the research data. While, depending on the context of their racial equity work (e.g. whether as part of their employment or within community organizations and initiatives), Black racial equity workers may find themselves thrown into working alongside Whites in these endeavours without having specifically chosen to do so, the participants in this study suggest that there are good reasons for working alongside Whites in these endeavours. This chapter will take up these arguments as they are advanced by the research participants. The reasons they provide for working alongside Whites fall into roughly two categories—ethical reasons and strategic reasons—and these two categories will form the structure of this chapter.

It is important that I point out here that this chapter is not concerned with the ways that Black racial equity workers partner and work with colleagues in the work who
happen to be white. It goes without saying that within any collaborative endeavour, there will be mutual interdependence that is not necessarily related to race or any other socially constructed identity or axis of oppression. What this chapter does examine is the ways in which Black racial equity workers see Whites being involved as Whites in racial equity work, and the roles Whites may assume or be asked to assume based upon the significance of their whiteness or their potential efficacy as Whites in these roles. In other words, then, this chapter looks at the contested role of whiteness and white privilege in the domain of racial equity work.

PART I: Why Whites Must Do Racial Equity Work

5.2 Whites should not leave it to Blacks to Challenge Racism

This section addresses the reasons that the participants gave for why Whites should do racial equity work.

First, the participants claim that there is not always a clear distinction between what might be considered racial equity work and what is simply behaving equitably and responsibly within a racially diverse context. Where they are working and living in racially diverse contexts, the participants insist that Whites not see the intricate and delicate matters that arise in those contexts as matters that should automatically be deferred Blacks. For example, Beverly says:

**Beverly:** And I think that Whites should do antiracist work. I really and truly believe in that. I find that within the school system, people think that because I am Black, then I should deal with the Black kids. And I remember when I took on my position that when the Black kids were misbehaving, people would come and get me. And so I stopped going into that area because I think that white teachers need to know how to deal with Black students. And I left it open and I said, “Well if you
have a question, ask me that question about what you can do and the rest of it, but your role as a white teacher is to work with Black students.”

From this excerpt, we note that Beverly is not suggesting that she cannot be consulted in these situations. Indeed, she offers her support in dealing with these kinds of situations as Whites require it. In this way, Beverly alludes to the necessity of input from diverse (racial) perspectives when it comes to dealing with situations that could become racially charged, and in this way seems to point to the value of Black embodied experience in these situations. However, she is clear that Whites need to take ownership in/of these situations and become competent at acting equitably within them. It should not be assumed that this is somehow the role and responsibility of Blacks or other Nonwhites.

However, the participants assert that another dimension to this insistence upon white involvement in racial equity work is that a lot of that work takes place in order to educate Whites about these matters and to draw them out of the colour-blind positions within which their white privilege is invisible to them. Consequently, it seems only fair that the responsibility for this work should not always fall to them. Indeed, Whites should take responsibility for this work and do it among other Whites where the need is greatest. Diane points out:

**Diane:** There are people who are talking about white studies these days, and the belief there is that there has to be work done in the white community about racism and about their part in racism. So, from that point of view, yes, I think there’s a lot of work to be done in that community. The focus is generally not there. The focus is not generally on, “How do we reform our community to eliminate or diminish racism.” The focus is on, generally speaking, “How do we help racialized people cope with racism which is the wrong perspective. We already know how to cope. We’ve been coping since slavery. So we have the coping skills. What we need is a transformation in the white community so that racism doesn’t occur. And we don’t control that! … to me, they do need to sort of take ownership of that work. That doesn’t mean I’m going to agree with what they produce, but it means that it is really their ability as white people to be able to analyze the actions of other white people in terms of racism. So in that sense they
have ownership of that. … But {sigh} *but, but* I see them as taking control of the work as oppressors, OK? So this is what makes an oppressor tick. This is what causes people in my community to oppress other people. *That’s* the work I see them doing and having ownership of. … So the white people who are doing their work in their own communities are doing it from an oppressor position, and not an oppressed one.

Diane clearly problematizes the notion that racism should be the concern of the victims of racism. She argues that Whites have a responsibility to take up the mantle of racial equity work, and specifically the work that needs to take place within white communities of making racial oppression visible and determining ways to end white participation in systems of racial dominance. As she describes this work, Diane makes it clear that this is not the kind of white work that either tries to speak for the racially oppressed or that is meant to contradict Black standpoints and knowledge. However, it does take up the responsibility of getting involved with racial equity work and bringing an end to white supremacy.

Diane’s position harmonizes quite well with those of other participants who make the case that racism is a white issue rather than a Black issue. This premise makes their involvement in racial equity work an imperative. To illustrate, when asked whether Whites should be an integral part of racial equity work, Ajani responds:

**Ajani:** First of all, they’re gonna be integral when it comes to within predominantly white communities and organizations and establishments that have historically been white dominated or culturally Eurocentric or whatever it may be. … And then the other thing is that this is a white problem, a Eurocentric problem made into an African problem. Because that’s what slavery was. It’s not a Black African problem. It’s a *European* problem! … So that’s a problem originating with them. And that’s where when they try to defuse everything and deflect it and say, “Don’t look back. That was the past.” The real issue is they have had a problem and still do, and there’s never been a point where they—. First, there’s been no repair, so how are you gonna tell me anything has changed? … But really I would say, it’s *their* issue internally, that has become our issue.
In a similar vein, Sharon also responds to the question about whether Whites need to be involved in racial equity work. She responds:

**Sharon:** Yes, because if they’re not, then it keeps it at the level like it’s my problem and it lets them off the hook once again. So I do think that they have to take that responsibility of—, the first step that they need to take towards being an integral part of it is that knowledge that racism is a problem and that white privilege is an issue, and a lot of people don’t even understand that from the word “Go”! So, ahm, so, yes, there has to be an acceptance of that and then we can negotiate the ways in which you need to be a part of this.

Sharon states explicitly that, for Whites, getting involved in racial equity work is an integral part of acknowledging the reality of racial inequity and one’s implication in white privilege. There is therefore an obligation for Whites to become involved in racial equity work if they want to truly lay claim to an identity that opposes racial inequity.

As will be the main theme of Chapter 6, Sharon does see the possible complications and contradictions that are implied in involving Whites in racial equity work as Whites or because of their whiteness. However, to summarize the arguments of this section, the participants in this study argue that Whites need to be involved in racial equity work for what might be considered moral reasons. They insist that the responsibility to challenge racial inequity should not rest solely with the racially oppressed, and argue that it is impossible for Whites to demonstrate a thorough understanding of race and racism or even a commitment to racial equity without a concurrent involvement in racial equity work.

**PART II: Whiteness Opens Doors: White Privilege in Racial Equity Work**

### 5.3 Introduction

In addition to the moral reasons that the participants advance for white involvement in racial equity work, many of the participants also claim that there are
strategic advantages to doing racial equity work with Whites, and that these advantages are very much anchored in the way that the white body is taken up in the context of a white supremacist society. For these participants, white privilege and power\(^{28}\) are legitimately used in racial equity work if used to open doors and to access resources for the work that would be more challenging for Black bodies to access given the inequitable racial terrain.

As we examine these perspectives, the reader will notice that the participants differ with respect to how they understand this phenomenon and its implications. They vary in terms of how rigid these generalizations are, and with respect to how they accept or resist operating within the confines of these patterns. Chapters 6 and 8 will take up, respectively, the contradictions within, and strategies of resistance to, the dynamic that I will be presenting in this part of the chapter, and in most instances, I will defer a discussion of these for full consideration in those chapters.

The focus in this part will be upon the potential that Black racial equity workers see for mobilizing the whiteness of their white colleagues to further racial equity work.

### 5.4 Whiteness Gives Access to Resources for Racial Equity Work

As we talked about the roles Whites might assume in racial equity work, Diane opined:

**Diane:** I do think that—and this may be altruistic in a way—but I do believe that white skin opens certain doors, and some of those doors include funding doors. And so, in that sense, while I may have some, ah, resistance in terms of “Gee, you

---

\(^{28}\) One of my participants pointed out that he term white power sometimes carries with it connotations of extreme white supremacist positions such as Neo-Nazi and other blatantly bigoted hate groups. When I use the term throughout this work, I refer not to this, but rather to the social authority and influence that accrues to white bodies in a white supremacist society. Likewise, my use of the term white supremacy is not to be understood to refer only to these extreme positions, but to any practices, racial ideologies and state apparatuses that act to position Whites as superior, more desirable, or more worthy of esteem than Nonwhites.
know, I think we’re capable of doing this work and there’s a lot of work to be
done in the white community,” because of the way that society is structured,
unfortunately we do need some of those white faces to open those doors. That
doesn’t mean that I think that they necessarily have the kind of expertise that is
required to do the work. But they do have power, and of course that’s what
racism is all about. They do have power. They do have connections that we can
use.

Terrence echoes Diane’s position when he says,

**Terrence:** That’s what you need; you need that white man to say, “I’ll give you
the resources,”

These participants see access to resources and connections to power as being linked to the
white body, and they value the way that the whiteness of their colleagues may help them
to acquire connections and resources to support racial equity work. Indeed, these
particular participants frame this as more than just an asset for the work. They seem to
say that it is often a necessity in racial equity work, so much so that Whites’ involvement
is important despite what Diane sees as their probable lack of expertise in actually doing
the work. The immediate context of this excerpt makes it clear that the lack of expertise
of which Diane speaks refers to the epistemic limitations of the white body discussed in
the previous chapter. However, in terms of value for racial equity work, the participants
seem to suggest that whatever the epistemic disadvantages attached to the white body,
they are somewhat offset by the privilege given to that body with respect to accessing
important resources for the work.

The participants’ position does ring true when we consider how racism,
xenophobia, and white privilege impact bodies differently vis-à-vis gaining access to
employment, promotion, and acquiring personal wealth (see e.g., Agocs and Jain, 2001;
Canadian Council of Social Development, 2000; Teelucksingh and Galabuzi, 2005).
Further, despite whatever effect employment equity provisions may have had, long
standing and ongoing inequity in these domains makes it such that the higher one goes in corporate and governmental structures, the whiter they are. Therefore, the institutional power to effect organizational and societal change within and through these structures is much more likely to be associated with white bodies than with nonwhite bodies.

In discussing the relationship between whiteness and access to resources, it is important to note that a great deal of Critical Whiteness scholarship has been devoted to challenging monolithic understandings of whiteness—particularly those that suggest that all white bodies have equal access to socio-economic and class privilege (see, e.g., Hartigan, 2003; Newitz & Wray, 1997b; Wray & Newitz, 1997). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that white identities are cut across by other axes of social identity such as gender, class, ethnicity, immigration status, dis/ability, etc., such that social status and privilege varies widely among Whites. Furthermore, in absolute terms, many nonwhite individuals may be positioned to receive greater social privilege and status than some Whites. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Howard, 2004, p. 70), white skin does afford privilege, and despite some scholars’ arguments that appear to try to undermine the notion of white privilege altogether (e.g., Hartigan, 1997; Hartigan, 2000; Hartigan, 2003; Wray & Newitz, 1997), where other axes of social identity are held constant, the person with white skin will have more social privilege than the nonwhite person in the contemporary Euro-North American racial context.

With this in mind, therefore, the participants’ statements about whiteness giving access to finances and resources should not be understood as essentialist. Indeed, on the basis of similar interests, racial equity organizations and movements often bring together individuals who are similarly located (e.g. students, workers, parents). Thus, to the
extent that colleagues in racial equity work are similarly located with respect to other aspects of social identity, racial difference is likely to become quite salient in terms of locating them differently in terms of access to finances and resources.

Finally, we note that Diane does not see Whites’ greater access to resources as the way things ought to be. She claims to be resistant to this dynamic, and is concerned about what it suggests about Black autonomy, and what it does not say about Whites’ implication in racism. Consequently, where she acquiesces it is with a clear understanding that the need to do so is rooted in the racial inequity of the social context. Nevertheless, Diane and Terrence tell us that given the inequitable societal structures we inhabit, the whiteness of a white colleague in racial equity work can be useful for accessing financial and other resources for racial equity work.

5.5 Whiteness Gives Racial Equity Work Access to Certain Spaces

Other participants point out that Whites involved in racial equity work can bring the racial equity project into spaces to which Blacks have limited or no access. Sharon says:

Sharon: I can’t have those conversations when your [the white person’s] Aunt May comes over and starts talking about those Black and Indian people on these reservations who can’t be happy with what they have. You need to have those kinds of conversations. You need to have those discussions. You need to understand, when a conversation comes up around access and equity and why there are people of Colour who need to be in certain positions, that you have a role to play at those sites too. Now I’m not saying that those are the only sites, but I can’t do that sort of work. … I also want white folks, when they sit at their dinner table or when they go in to see the Chief of Police or whatever, because they’re more likely to get access, to be able to say, “This is why this is a problem.”
Sharon insists that white racial equity workers have a responsibility to challenge racism in those exclusively white spaces—often domestic and other family spaces—where other Whites may assume that there is consensus about race and racism and, therefore, feel comfortable enough to voice their outright bigotry or simply the mis/understandings of race and racism that make up dominant racial discourse and bolster racial inequity.

Similarly, where because of the type of racial inequity discussed in the preceding section, white racial equity workers are more likely than their Black colleagues to gain access to sites of power, the white racial equity workers should be able to advance the arguments and interests of the racial equity project. Sharon suggests that white racial equity workers passing through these exclusively white spaces have an obligation to rupture racist discourse and the assumption of white solidarity with respect to racial inequity. Instead they should establish sites of antiracist resistance and challenge within these spaces. This is particularly important because Blacks are not present in these spaces to mount this type of challenge.

Imani also weighs in on this point, discussing the work of a well known Canadian racial equity worker known for advocating for racial equity at home and abroad:

Imani: This is why I try not to over-generalize about white people doing this [racial equity] work, because there are some who use the advantages of being white to do the work and then open the doors for the rest of us to march through. There are some people who use the advantages of their being white to close the doors to the rest of us. And that’s what I see as the difference. And he realizes the advantage. I don’t think he’s naïve enough not to, you know. He’s taken that as an advantage to do that work and to have access to those places where many of us wouldn’t have access.

Imani adds to Sharon’s insights that the whiteness of the white racial equity worker can also be used to give Black racial equity workers access to spaces that are otherwise
closed to them. This represents a deliberate and strategic approach to racial equity work by the white racial equity worker that relies squarely upon white privilege.

In summary, then, the whiteness of the white racial equity worker which gains her/him access to exclusively white spaces and/or opens those spaces to Black racial equity workers is important in racial equity work for the purpose of bringing antiracist resistance into these spaces where hegemonic whiteness prevails.

5.6 Whiteness, Credibility and Competence in Racial Equity Work

Closely related to the dynamic discussed in the foregoing section, some of the participants also see whiteness as affecting whether and how the racial equity message is heard and received by white audiences. That is, even when Black racial equity workers have access to white spaces—whether in racial equity workshops, organizational and institutional spaces, or in the context of local and international equity projects, Whites may be received more easily than Blacks. The whiteness of white racial equity workers might therefore be used to gather and/or rally a sympathetic (white) audience for racial equity work. I discuss this effect in this section.

5.6.1 Whiteness can mobilize a sympathetic audience for racial equity work

Some participants see Whites as being more likely to garner broad appeal and support for racial equity work and global racial concerns. As our conversation turned to the work of the high profile Canadian mentioned above, Terrence said:

Terrence: He’s captivating, high-profile. The best job that he can do, raise consciousness, raise money. Because the reality is if Terrence wanted to host an event to raise $200 000 for that cause, I could not. He can. This is where we
need to leverage those people … I look at him as a white man using his position of power to actually make a change.

Terrence feels that this individual’s work has been invaluable in the cause of racial equity. He contrasts this person’s ability to raise funds and win the cooperation of very significant numbers of Whites for racial equity work with his assessment of his own ability to do so. Terrence attributes this man’s success to his being white, and suggests by implication that because he, Terrence, is Black he would not have been able to achieve the same results. Terrence is therefore quite happy to support this man’s use of his white privilege for the racial equity cause.

In her interview, Imani independently agrees that this man’s success has been a result of his being white. She says:

**Imani:** … part of that advantage he has had is being white, because there are people who listen to him who would not normally have listened to one of us [Blacks] saying what we’ve said.

Once again, there is the clear intimation that whiteness is operating to support racial equity work by helping this man to gain the co-operation and consideration of other Whites for the racial equity project. While there are certainly many prominent Black individuals and celebrities who take up racial equity causes on an international level, there are few if any Blacks in Canada who take up these issues and have this kind of broad appeal. So in the Canadian context, Terrence’s and Imani’s observations seem to have merit.

**5.6.2 The inscription of partiality and incompetence upon the Black body**

The excerpts above also draw specific attention to how the body bearing the racial equity message is read, and to how that body affects the way the message is received by
Whites, and therefore the context within which whiteness becomes a strategic asset for presenting the racial equity message. Quentin, a long-time racial equity worker on many fronts, who has also been elected to public office, tells us more:

**Quentin:** My experience has been, and I maintain this, is that when we do antiracism sessions or race relations, diver—, whatever you want to call it, my experience has been with white participants that the message isn’t as well received when it’s coming from somebody of African descent—especially from the male.

What Quentin claims is that white individuals and predominantly white audiences (which are quite often the type of audience to which a racial equity message will be presented in Canada) are less prone to attend to and consider a racial equity message when it comes from a Black spokesperson than when it comes from a white spokesperson.

Sharon speaks of the same dynamic:

**Sharon:** I think that the advantage, a possible advantage, [of working with Whites in racial equity work]—at least the way I’ve read it when I did it—is that the onus isn’t always on you as the person of Colour. Because naturally you are read as, “Of course you’re gonna say these things. Of course you’re gonna talk about oppression. You’re Black” So, I think when you balance it off, it does take on something very different, it takes on a different dynamic. So I think that there’s that possibility for it to be good that way.

Here, Sharon tells us that in her experience, Black racial equity workers are taken as having a chip on their shoulders or as advancing a cause that is not legitimate when they speak about racial equity. Their racial equity work is seen as selfish and self-interested. Imani also speaks about the air of dismissal that Black racial equity workers are often met with:

**Imani:** And sometimes that’s true of us. We go out to speak and there are some people in the audience, and you know they’re saying, “Here they come again complaining about something. {In a sing-song voice} “Hm. Hm. Hm. Here they are,” you know, “always, you know, there they are in this country.” Yeah, you can see it on their faces and you’re thinking, “Oh my gosh!”
Of course, where Black racial equity workers are presupposed to be riding a hobby horse rather than advancing a legitimate and important cause, this presupposition functions as a direct challenge to the Black racial equity worker’s legitimacy and competence.

Other participants concur, and suggest the ideological assumptions that may be at work to create this situation. Diane comments on the attitude of some of her white colleagues:

**Diane:** … but then they will turn around and they will say that we as racialized people are too biased to be able to do proper analysis, or to be able to write from a perspective that is objective. Well, I’m sorry but that, just as a matter of common sense, is irrational.

What Diane tells us here is that Whites, and even some Whites involved in racial equity work, take the position that Blacks, as those who have historically suffered racial oppression, are prone to be too emotionally invested in the racial equity project to be able to be fair and “objective.”

Strangely, there is no corresponding interrogation of the white body’s probable investment in the racial status quo that affords her/him racial privilege, and which might undermine her racial equity work. Instead, the opposite happens. Imani says more about this peculiar dynamic, saying:

**Imani:** But back to the whole business of who does what, who says the thing is very much a part of how people accept it or not. And it means something different. You know, white people who talk to white people about equity, and of course different people understand different messages from it, but if you’re opposed to it, you know, sometimes people say, “Oh well, isn’t he great? He’s really concerned.” I say, “No. Isn’t he normal? He’s supposed to be!”


---

29 Of course, objectivity in this instance refers to that disinterested (di)stance that makes racial equity work entertainment or simply the sharing of provocative ideas rather than a politically motivated, action-oriented (Dei, 1996b, p. 25) thrust for social change.
Imani points out the ideological context that affords Whites a privileged voice because of the seeming selflessness of becoming involved in racial equity work, while it simultaneously undermines the Black voice as being “overly sensitive.” For doing the same racial equity work, one’s white body qualifies one as always already selfless, a great humanitarian interested in the common good, while the Black body is always already disqualified from being the same.

Diane connects this issue of interestedness to the notion of competence:

**Diane:** My experience is that people who are Caucasian are generally given sort of an inherent competency or superiority in terms of some issues. And racism is one of them, which is odd because they are not victims of racism, they generally are perpetrators. But, there seems to be, because we are generally in the minority, there seems to be the position in antiracism work, that if the work is done by a white person, it’s more valid, it’s got less biases attached to it, etcetera, etcetera.

Here Diane posits that the discourse of Black interestedness is part and parcel of a larger discourse that inscribes incompetence upon the Black body. This understanding of the Black body as incompetent and less intelligent is a long-standing and ongoing racist trope. Within this ideological climate, Whites are understood as intrinsically competent, and by implication and contrast, the Black body is seen as being inherently incompetent even, and perhaps particularly, within racial equity work.

Imani also finds the same discourse operating. She relates her experience on the board of a corporation. Paradoxically, she has been invited, on the basis of her involvement in racial equity work, to be a part of this board, yet she is still presumed incompetent:

**Imani:** … there’s the expectation that I don’t know. Or if I say something, the credit for it is assigned to somebody else, if it’s right it’s assigned to somebody else. I have to make a real rrgh to get my 3 cents in.
Philip: This is where you’re invited to actually be—

Imani: Be on the board, and serve as the president … You know this, this assumption. And it’s, you know, you just to have to get up too early in the morning to be treated that way.

This inscription of incompetence places the Black racial equity worker in a no-win situation. If she is silent, her incompetence is assumed; if she speaks out of her expertise but her position is unpopular, she is undermined; if her position is valued, it is appropriated or attributed to someone else. Where competence and incompetence are inscribed upon the body in this manner, only the white voice can be right.

This phenomenon may be related, in part, to the epistemic advantage that Blacks have in recognizing which was discussed in Chapter 6. If Black’s have an advantage in terms of recognizing and naming racism, then Whites’ corresponding disadvantage with respect to identifying racism may lead their impression that Blacks are claiming something that does not exist. However, the difference between not seeing what others see and therefore dismissing it, and acknowledging that you do not see but that that person’s perspective may be valid is the difference between epistemic disadvantage and political arrogance. This arrogance is, no doubt, the climate that gives rise to the participants’ insistence upon their epistemic authority as seen in Chapter 4.

However, despite their own sense of Black epistemic authority in racial equity work, many of the participants make strategic decisions in the course of their racial equity work that take this inscription of in/competence into account—some positioning white bodies to be the ones to say the things that may be difficult for Whites to hear. We recall from Section 5.2 the imperative for Whites to join in the project of challenging racism when they see it. It is not inconceivable that part of what he sees as the value in
their doing so is its potential to validate to Whites the claims that Blacks are making about the existence of racism and the urgency to challenge it within a context that is predisposed to undermine Black claims to this effect. Within this climate, the Black word on the matter is likely to be deemed insufficient and is in need of white corroboration. Quentin tells us more about working within this climate:

**Quentin:** My experience has been the participants are too eager to pat themselves on the back and not do the self-reflection that’s required. … what people in the white community never heard probably when it comes to racism is again, I’m reiterating now, is that self-reflection and sometimes it requires the person who looks more like them to look at the white privilege that they have. And for me to stand up and talk about white privilege, people get defensive and people say, “Well, you know what? I’m not like that.” But when someone that’s not Black gets up and talks about white privilege, and I can stand there and give examples of what he or she just said, it really drives the message home. So I think there’s some value in partnerships. I’m not convinced, and only because I haven’t seen it, I’m not convinced that a white facilitator can deliver—. Well, maybe deliver the same message, but may not have the same impact.

**Philip:** If they were alone?

**Quentin:** If they were alone, yeah. … I worked with individuals of white and First Nations: a white male and a white female and a First Nations Miq’maq female. Who I worked with depended on the audience I was going to. So I would pre-screen the audience and then I would select who was going to work with me. … With the white male, I used him a lot of times because the power is in white males. So, we could reinforce one another. So when we talked about the privilege that white individuals have, he could talk about that from the perspective of being a white male and I could certainly follow up with examples of how it differs from me as an African in this province.

Sharon feels similarly. When asked about whether she would strategically position the white voice to say certain things in racial equity work, she says:

**Sharon:** It would depend on the audience. Do you remember what happened to {name withheld for confidentiality} when he tried to deliver antiracism training workshops to {name of organization withheld for confidentiality}? He was thoroughly discredited, not just by the organization, but also by the media. This was a clear warning to all antiracism workers that elite institutions will close ranks to protect their interests. I wonder if he would have stood a better chance if he had worked with a white colleague. He must have known that this would be a
hostile environment. So I would have to consider the gender and class of the audience in my design of a workshop to figure out best strategies. And, if I decide to work with a white colleague, we would have to talk about who would say what and why.

For Sharon, it comes down to a matter of self-preservation and the hazards of doing racial equity work in hostile and unreceptive environments. However, as much as Quentin and Sharon speak about partnership in these excerpts, it is not hard to discern that in the interest of getting through to the white audience, their role is reduced to a seemingly subordinate one of supporting and reinforcing what their white colleague have first said.

As in the preceding sections of this chapter, many of the participants realize that deferring to whiteness in this manner, and the conditions that cause them to have to consider these strategies, are rooted in inequity. In the above excerpt as well as Imani’s before that, one can sense their struggle to reassert their authority, legitimacy, and place within a racial dynamic that operates to undermine it. Several of the Black racial equity workers in this study resent that it is this way. On this point, answering a question about whether whiteness affects the kind of racial equity work a person does, Imani says:

**Imani:** It certainly influences the work that you do. I don’t think it *should*, but it does. White people, and I’m generalizing here, and in this kind of interview we’ll have to, and I realize that it is a generalization, but generally speaking, white people will very often take criticism about or analysis about their behaviours relative to race from Whites differently from the way they will take it from Black people. And, it has to be differently phrased, and the prefacing it and preparing it has to be differently couched when it’s by the different races. Should it affect the position that you hold? No it shouldn’t!

While Imani makes clear her dissatisfaction with this racial dynamic, and unlike Terrence and Quentin (see Section 7.4.2) does not choose to play the game of positioning Whites to say what she has to say, she also clearly takes into account the existence of this
inequitable dynamic that locates Black and white bodies differently even within racial equity work.

5.6.3 Would it be the same if the races were reversed? James’s position

It is worth detouring a bit here to address the fact that with regard to the dynamic of Whites receiving criticism or instruction more easily from other Whites than from Blacks, some participants entertain the notion that it is the same in reverse—that is, that Blacks would prefer to be instructed by other Blacks, particularly about matters of race and racism.

To illustrate, in the following excerpt James describes speaking to Black community and employee groups as his job sometimes requires him to do:

**James:** I don’t know how best to describe this, but just to talk, for example, about that meeting in {Major Canadian City 3}. Before that conference, I did go to one other one in {Major Canadian City 6} when I had just started working here. It was almost the same mix; same number of people. And I was not a speaker. I just went as an observer. So people didn’t know who the heck I was. So I sat in there, and the group was really chastising my organization. They were saying, “You guys haven’t done anything. You haven’t done this for us. You’re useless,” this, this. But you see, when I went to the conference in {Major Canadian City 3}, I was the speaker. I explained to them what I’m doing. I spoke to them as one of their own. So it was a lot easier for them to understand where I was coming from. I was able to tell them that, “Yes, we can do this. No we cannot do this.” If it had been a white person, I don’t think those guys would have taken him that kindly because they would have just come to the conclusion that he doesn’t know what he’s talking about … It just happens to be the way we are. This is human nature. We tend to hire people that look like us, talk like us, who think, who behave like us, and that’s why we hire them. That’s why the white person always hires somebody white. So I don’t apologize to people at all when I tell them I’m gonna staff my department with visible minorities. Not all visible minorities, but I’ll make sure there are some. Right now there’s not a single one out of the several people I have working for me. And that is wrong! And that’s what I’m talking about. I get very passionate about this as you can tell.
James refers, here, to the difference in response of a predominantly Black audience to the same presentation made by a white body and a Black body about the racial equity work that his organization has been doing. He tells us that the Black audiences were more receptive to a Black speaker than a white one, and suggests that this might have had to do with preference for one’s own racial group. He also suggests that the Black audience might have assessed the white man as not having an understanding of the racial equity matter at hand.

There are some problematic aspects to this argument. While James clearly recognizes the effects of systemic racism in hiring that occur when employers attribute excellence and competence to those who remind them of themselves, James is also clearly relying on widely accessible hegemonic, liberal discourses about race and difference for an explanation of this and of the different ways in which the Black and white speakers were received by the Black audiences. James understands racism as arising from quirks in human nature—quirks that incite us to prefer those most like us. He seems to buy into the liberal race discourses that imply that we are all equally culpable in the perpetuation of racial intolerance. This is also the basis upon which claims of “reverse racism” have been founded, and we can certainly see where his hiring policies could be understood this way within his liberal race paradigm.

Congruent with this understanding, then, he sees the phenomenon of Whites preferring to hear from other Whites about race and racism as equivalent to Blacks preferring to hear from Blacks about solutions and strategies for addressing race and racism. In discussing this instance, he does not address, and therefore appears not to have consistently integrated into his critical understanding of race and racism, the discourses
and ideologies that inscribe incompetence and lower intelligence upon the bodies of
Blacks in a way that does not happen for Whites. In his explanation, he also does not
take into account the subtle ways in which whiteness protects its own interests. Without
an understanding of these discursive, ideological, and socio-political pillars of racial
inequity it would be impossible to completely understand Whites’ resistance to hearing
from a Black racial equity worker. Furthermore, once we acknowledge the operation of
these tropes, it seems inadequate to attribute the Black audience’s resistance to the white
racial equity worker solely to a supposed feeling that the person does not know what he is
talking about, especially when they are critical of his organization’s efficacy in racial
equity.

Though there are at least two points in James’s interview where he does indeed
report and challenge the inscription of incompetence upon Nonwhites, both himself and
others (see below in this section), he falls back upon liberal race ideologies based in
“human behaviour.” He appears not to grasp fully the racial discourses and dynamics
which are at work and which make this so much more than just human nature. For
example, listen in on this excerpt:

**Philip:** Do you have any advice or cautions for people who are white who would
work along with Blacks in [racial equity] initiatives?

**James:** Listen, listen, listen! That’s really it. Listen, listen, listen! Listen, listen,
listen, and try to be understanding don’t write them off.

**Philip:** This is the caution to the white person?

**James:** Yes, to the white person. Because they think we’re stupid. They think
we’re dumb because we speak with accents, we’re Black we don’t behave like
they do, occasionally we flare up and they are so controlled and all this kind of
nonsense. So, they think we are crazy. It is true. I see it happening everyday. I
mean, look, there’s an East Indian guy working here and he speaks with this
Indian accent, fairly heavy, and when he talks most people just ignore him, and
half the time the guy is talking sense. And it’s just—, you see it goes back to human behaviour. You see things and people that you’re not familiar with and you don’t understand; you are scared of, so you back off. But if you give them the time or you take the time yourself to understand them you’ll see where they’re coming from or where you wanna go, the background, the context in which they are relaying the story to you, it becomes a lot easier. You begin to see, “Actually, it’s not bad.” But you see white people never do that.

Here, James shows evidence that he is very aware of the assumptions made within dominant discourse about the intelligence of Nonwhites—assumptions based in difference from white identity. Therefore, any markers of difference from Whites, whether real (such as race or accent) or imagined (as James indicates when he comments sarcastically upon racist assumptions that “occasionally we flare up and they are so controlled”), are read as incompetence. However, James again indicates a superficial understanding of this dynamic, psychologizing a phenomenon that is rooted less in “normal” individual psyche, but much more in deeply ingrained, socially constructed ideologies of race.

As we consider James’ interpretations, it is important to recall that James grew up in an African nation (where he would not have been a “minority”), came to Canada a generation ago as an already well-educated young adult, and that he currently holds a fairly powerful governmental position in which he has authority over a predominantly white staff. This position has also afforded him financial security for the greater part of his life in Canada. This position of authority and his socio-economic status may cause the inscription of incompetence upon the Black body to have impacted upon him much less than it might upon Blacks who are differently positioned. Given that Blacks—and particularly those who have been academically and economically successful—live within an increasingly global white supremacist context, are equally exposed to the hegemonic
racist discourses that circulate, and are educated within the same white supremacist educational institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, pp. 151-173; Dei, 2006a, p. 30), it is not at all surprising that some, like James, will buy into widely disseminated and easily accessible liberal race discourses to explain the phenomena that they see and experience. It is only as they experience the flaws and fissures in this logic (as James is beginning to through his children who are well educated but are having difficulty acquiring commensurate employment) that they are incited to more critical understandings. I contend that James is still developing his critical position, even at this late stage in his life.

However, that James buys into liberal explanations of racism does not contradict the notion of Black epistemic authority. As I argued in the last chapter, Black embodied knowledge arises out of the direct experience of race and racism, but needs to exist alongside a critical rational consciousness. Blacks’ embodied knowledge provides epistemic advantage over white bodies with respect to recognizing and identifying racism. James is keenly aware of the operation of race and racism, and is able to identify it when it is occurring. He is able to recognize, for example, the treatment of his South Asian colleague as racist when, in all likelihood, his white colleagues who perpetrate this racist behaviour would, in all sincerity, attribute it to anything else through the operation of colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b, pp. 53-56). Consequently, within a racial equity project, James’ acuity in recognizing this dynamic would be useful. However, this does not mean that he will have better explanations of what he observes and experiences without having intentionally undertaken a rational critical, (though not necessarily formal) endeavour to understand the racial landscape.
5.6.4 Would it be the same if the races were reversed? Imani’s position

Imani also entertains the notion that Blacks might prefer to be instructed by other Blacks—particularly about matters of race and racism. However, she uses a very different tone and has a more nuanced interpretation and explanation. She does not see this as a simple inversion of Whites’ preferring to be taught by Whites. Imani relates this personal experience to illustrate:

**Imani:** There’s also, you know, a message, a sender, and it has a receiver, you know. And sometimes the receiver is, ahm, ill-tuned because of the messenger. For example, I remember once we had this person coming to do a workshop on racism and equity in our school board. And I don’t know where they live now, but they were originally from South Africa, and they were white. And I said, “I’m gonna be sick that day” {both laugh}. I said “They’ve got a lot of work to do.” And remember this was way back then when Nelson Mandela was still in prison. And even now! I said, “They have a lot of work to do, and I am not sitting here at the foot of the throne listening to this. I think I have a headache. I feel a cold coming on,” you know. “I’m not gonna be in” {both laugh}.

**Philip:** And that was based on?

**Imani:** I didn’t even know the person! Didn’t know the person. So that’s what I mean about the receiver. And my receiver obviously—. Now that person might have been one of the people I described. Very good, sensitive, you know, had that skill. I just said, “I don’t think so. I can’t!” My receiver for that message from that accent, from that voice, from that person, was not there at that time, {Philip laughs} and I wasn’t gonna do that.

So here, it appears that Imani’s claim that Blacks might hear some racial equity messages more easily from other Blacks than from Whites seems not to be based upon a crude racial politics whereby skin colour on its own determines whether one will receive the message or not. Rather, in this particular instance, Imani is repelled by the contradiction between the location of this white South African—whose racial location has caused him to benefit from the South African apartheid system then in place—and the authority he
claims as a spokesperson for racial equity. It would appear that this contradiction is Imani’s primary consideration when she decides that she will not hear this speaker, and she makes this decision fully aware that he may, indeed, have the credentials required to do good racial equity work.

Regarding this dynamic, I have argued elsewhere (Howard, 2006) that Whites working within antiracist contexts, particularly knowledge-producing antiracist contexts, should be careful, as a part of their antiracist politics, to make visible their understanding of the way that their bodies position them contradictorily in this work. This should consist of an open accounting of themselves and how they come to the work (Howard, 2006, pp. 57-59). I speculate that this is just what Imani seems to be seeking, and that an accounting of the sort I contend for might have established his credibility, and made the difference as she decided whether to attend this speaker’s presentation. Such an open accounting, in advance of the presentation and by whatever means he might have chosen to do so, might have provided evidence that he understood his contradictory location, and that he had done some of the reflective and practical work, as an individual and as a white South African, that would be necessary for him to equitably and responsibly take up the role of racial equity speaker. The absence of such an accounting points to the possibility of an incompletely developed opposition to the way his white identity positions him for dominance in the South African setting and indeed the rest of the world. It indicates the possibility that in going to hear him speak, Imani could subject herself to the violence of hearing expressions of whiteness through the very channels that claim to be challenging it. Her receiver is therefore off.
So, the rejection of this white racial equity worker is not directly related to his critical knowledge of race and racism, or the lack thereof. Instead, it is connected quite reasonably to the conditions under which this knowledge is being communicated. The fall-back position for a white person in a white supremacist context is pro-racism, not “non-racist.” Indeed to be so-called non-racist is to fail to act against racial injustice (see Dei, 1996a, p. 135). If a white person would do racial equity work, it is reasonable to expect some evidence that s/he is actively and continuously rejecting that stance to become antiracist. Blacks’ requiring this of white racial equity workers is not the equivalent of Whites’ rejection of the Black racial equity.

5.7 Chapter 5 Summary

To summarize, working from the participants’ narratives, this chapter has taken up the participants’ opinions that that Whites should be involved in racial equity work on moral grounds; and that the white privilege and power of the white racial equity worker are strategically useful in racial equity work to gain access to funds and resources for the work, to mount antiracist challenge in exclusive white spaces, and to gain the work a hearing and consideration with white audiences. Thus, white involvement in racial equity work is a reality.

The participants do differ with respect to what this involvement might look like, and they are well aware that any strategic need to use white power in this work arise from the racially inequitable social arrangements and ideologies within which we live. To reiterate what I stated at the beginning of this chapter, this is not an exclusionary assertion that white involvement is not welcome in racial equity work. Indeed, as the
participants have argued, Whites ought to be involved in racial equity work. However, what this chapter has tried to establish is that whenever Whites are involved in racial equity work on the basis of their white identities, or when their whiteness (i.e. their white privilege and power) is strategically positioned to further racial equity work, these arrangements are, themselves, founded in racial inequity. Even so, the participants are often willing to mobilize and work with this whiteness in the interest of furthering the racial equity agenda.
CHAPTER 6

THE CONTOURS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF WHITENESS AND FOR WHITE BODIES IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

6.1 Introduction: The Double-Edged Sword

Chapters 4 and 5 have presented the two largest thematic/conceptual categories drawn from the research data in this study. Chapter 4 communicated the participants’ insistence upon Black agency in racial equity work, which grows largely from the salience of their embodied epistemologies and knowledge. The presentation of Blackness creates the conditions through which Blacks can become aware of the contradictions between their Black humanity and the claims of the white supremacist conditions within which they live. As the Black subject resolves these competing claims by asserting her/his full humanity the Black subject, over time, develops an embodied knowledge of race and racism that presupposes antiracist praxis. The Black racial equity worker who is brought to the work through the development of this embodied knowledge therefore has access to a type and depth of knowledge that the white ally cannot have, and which is essential in racial equity work.

Chapter 5 discusses that the participants see an important place for white bodies as white in racial equity work. Firstly, they feel it is their moral obligation to become involved in racial equity work inasmuch as the fight against oppression should not be left solely to the oppressed as though it were only the concern of the oppressed. To these participants, white involvement in the struggle against racial inequity is a vital part of responsibility and equitably occupying a white racial location in a racially inequitable social context. To fail to join in opposing racial inequity is, by default, to approve of the
fact that one passively reaps the benefits of white skin privilege, and therefore to be in
complicity with systems of racial inequity, and consenting to the racial domination of
Nonwhites. The participants do not outline the entire range of possibilities for the kinds
of involvement they seek from Whites in opposing racial inequity, but for the purposes of
this study, their position implies that there must be some Whites who will be engaged in
racial equity work, and that there must be some racial equity projects that will include
Whites.

Secondly, many of the participants see benefits for racial equity work in involving
the white privilege and power that accrues to white bodies. Some speak of the strategic
positioning of white bodies in this work in order to access resources or to promote the
acceptance of the racial equity message they are trying to communicate. They are well
aware of the inequitable social structures and beliefs that buttress these strategic moves,
but choose to enter, and in some cases feel compelled to enter, into these arrangements
for the sake of the work. For example, Beverly states:

**Beverly:** I always look at what’s best for all. There are situations where Blacks
are not listened to and what’s important is that the message is heard and
understood. Whites are better able to access certain systems and they should do
so. This is what we are working towards: “access by all.” If the support of Whites
is there to help make it happen we should work together to gain access. I refer to
this as bridging. In order to cross over the water sometimes we need a bridge, and
sometimes the white person is that bridge.

However, the view of most of the participants is that there are cautions about how
this kind of alliance work should be done, and all express that there are certain risks to
doing racial equity work in this manner. Some of these risks may be revealed by asking
some pertinent questions of Beverly’s foregoing excerpt. Agreeing with the existence of
a phenomenon discussed in Chapter 5, Beverly claims that the Black voice is dismissed
in certain contexts. She says that this effect is mitigated by accessing the support of white colleagues in speaking the messages that are not heard when Blacks speak them. The goal is “access by all.” The questions are: “Under these circumstances, who has gained access to what and who hasn’t?” “To what extent has who gained access, and what kinds of doors have remained closed to whom?” “How has inequity been acquiesced to in order to achieve ‘equity’?” And how is the agency and embodied knowledge of the Black racial equity worker undermined through these arrangements?

These questions bring us to the central concern of this thesis. Clearly, the two largest conceptual categories, which we have discussed—the salience of Black knowledge in racial equity work and the fact that whiteness can be utilized for the work—are contradictory. A Critical Race Africological analysis of this situation suggests that the one promotes the agency of the Black racial equity worker while the other promotes whiteness and may simultaneously undermine the agency of the Black racial equity worker. This contradiction structures the racial equity work that these participants do, and consequently frames the research data. All of the other significant conceptual categories/themes drawn from this data relate to this contradictory dynamic in some way.

Consistent with this assessment, three of the participants independently use the same metaphor to refer to the contradiction, and this is the metaphor from which the title of this dissertation has been drawn. They refer to the double-edged sword—an instrument that can cut two ways, achieving the objective of its use and/or wounding the wielder. For example, referring to the positioning of white bodies to speak the racial equity message so that the racial equity message is more likely to be favourably received by other Whites, Sharon says with some resign:
Sharon: I think it’s a double-edged sword, because it also speaks to credibility and how the potential is there for your own credibility as a person of Colour to be undermined. Then the white person speaking is seen as the voice of authority. So when I say it, it’s not given the same weight, but when she [her white woman colleague] says it to other white people, it’s like, “Oh!” The light bulb goes off! And because she’s saying it—! And God help us if it’s a white man that’s saying it because then, of course, if he says it—

Philip: It goes!

Sharon: Yah! So I mean these are the sorts of traps that I see. Like, I see the advantage to doing that, but I also see how a person’s credibility can be undermined and how you can fall into the trap of, well, “My voice doesn’t carry as much weight as yours.” So, where does that leave me, right? I’m still fighting for my credibility.

Sharon indicates that strategically taking into account the likelihood that the white body will more easily win the confidence and consideration of a (white) audience is to simultaneously reinforce and inadvertently validate the dismissal and negation of the Black voice.

Diane uses similar terminology, the notion of the double-bind, to describe her observation that though Whites ought to be involved in racial equity work, the approach they take is often ill-conceived, presuming the need to assist Blacks to deal with racism. She states:

Diane: It’s kind of a double-bind, isn’t it? And there are people, myself included actually, who are talking about white studies these days, and the belief there is that there has to be work done [by Whites] in the white community about racism and about their part in racism. So, from that point of view, yes, I think there’s a lot of work to be done in that community. The focus is generally not there. The focus is not generally on, “How do we reform our community to eliminate or diminish racism?” The focus is on, generally speaking, “How do we help racialized people cope with racism?” which is the wrong perspective. We already know how to cope.

Finally, Ajani speaks pointedly about the contradiction, again using the same type of metaphor:
**Ajani:** I would say you can definitely, ahm, benefit from the connections that are available within a white supremacy to a white person that are not available to others. I think that’s part of a double-sided blade where it can also allow for your trusted inside man to be lost because they’re in this situation where they have access, they have a sense of greater importance {laughs} than truly any one person really does have. So, I think that can make someone say, “Hey!” you know, “I did this!” you know what I mean? “This is me!” or “You need me,” or whatever it may be. It can cause some dysfunction.

Here, Ajani speaks of the precarious position of the white person who is using her/his white privilege to further racial equity work. He speaks of this “inside” person running the risk of attributing her/his efficacy and success in this domain to her/his own individual merits rather than realizing that, instead, this power flows largely from the inequitable context in which they work. Where this is the case, the result for the white person is an exaggerated sense of agency that masks and makes invisible to her/him the inequitable structures that are in play.

I bring forward these excerpts to indicate the participants’ understanding of the contradictory terrain upon which they do their racial equity work with Whites—particularly where it involves privileging these Whites in the work on the basis of their whiteness. Through these types of arrangements, the agency and equality of the racially oppressed, which ought to be the focus of any racial equity project, is claimed and promoted, even as the potential exists for it to be simultaneously undermined and erased. The remaining sections of this thesis will explore the nature of this contradiction, discuss what the implications are for white racial equity work, and examine how Black racial equity workers navigate and resist this tension.

This chapter will look at some of the various ways that the telltale characteristics of white dominance may take shape and find expression in racial equity work. As the respondents confirm, white power and white privilege do not only operate (ostensibly) to
support the work in the contradictory ways mentioned above, but they also mediate the relationships within the alliances. This may happen in two ways:

1) through specific individual performances of whiteness in this context

2) through the structural contradictions inherent to locating the white body as *white* in this work.

The performance of whiteness refers to approaches that white racial equity workers may take to the work of, and working relationships within, the alliances across lines of racial dominance. They flow from the white colleague’s inability, failure, or reluctance to recognize and undermine the ways in which white privilege is prone to manifest and protect itself—in Euro-North American society in general, and in the white colleague’s own life and work in particular. Here, it is the personal politics and praxis of the white body that are problematic. The structural contradictions arising from locating the white body as *white* in racial equity work present themselves because of how differently racialized bodies are positioned in the social/racial landscape and taken up in dominant discourses of race regardless of their individual politics.

The dynamics of these two types of intrusions of whiteness into racial equity work are not always easily distinguished, and may overlap. The sections within this chapter present the most recurring and salient manifestations of whiteness of which the participants speak in their interviews, and may contain elements of either one or the other dynamic, or they may contain both.

Certainly, the discussion in Section 3.1.6 about the identities and roles of the white people with whom the respondents worked (also) sets the stage for this discussion. Since there is no particular credential that Whites involved in racial equity work have that
other Whites do not have, and therefore since any alleged boundaries between those Whites involved in racial equity work and Whites in general are tenuous (if they exist at all), we might, indeed, expect that the complexities of white racial identity and whiteness will manifest themselves in these Black-white racial equity alliances as they do in other social situations involving Blacks and Whites. Indeed, a primary learning objective of this research has been to investigate and challenge the common-sense assumption that Whites involved in racial equity work have somehow, in the process of becoming a part of that work, been “inoculated” (Rains, 1998, p. 78) against performing whiteness, or made immune to the ways that they are positioned for racial privilege. While Blacks’ involvement in racial equity work is often accompanied by an embodied resistance knowledge and motivation for the work, white oppositional knowledge of race and racism is not embodied. Indeed, the way that the white body is positioned in white supremacist society generates an “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills, 1997, p. 18) (discussed more fully in Chapter 7) such that they embody a mystification of the workings of racism and their own place in it against which their resistance knowledge of race must constantly compete.

In keeping with this observation, the manifestations of whiteness that the participants discuss relate to:

a) Inequitable terms of relationship within racial equity work

b) The active or passive defense of white supremacy

c) Shifting the focus and benefits of racial equity work

I discuss these at length in the following sections.
6.2 Inequitable Relationships: Making the White Subject through Racial Equity Work

This section discusses the ways that some Whites involved in racial equity work conceive the work such that it results in inequitable colonial dynamics between Blacks and Whites. The performances of whiteness that result are firmly founded upon fantasies of benevolence, which, enabled by the racial equity context, function to create and/or reinforce a hierarchical relationship between Blacks and Whites on the basis of racial location. This hierarchy may be set up between white racial equity workers and those Blacks on whose behalf the racial equity work advocates, as well as between the white racial equity workers and their Black colleagues in the work. In all cases, these performances allow the white racial equity worker to know herself as white, and as superior to Blacks, who are correspondingly known as inferior.

The white racial equity worker does not necessarily engage in this kind of behaviour with the express intent of creating a racial hierarchy. Instead this phenomenon speaks to the pervasiveness and normalization of the racist meanings that allow us to create, recreate, and live out these hierarchies without necessarily even trying.

6.2.1 The “missionary” approach

The first manifestation of engaging in racial equity work upon inequitable terms that I present is what we might call the missionary approach. I introduce this section with an excerpt from Imani’s interview. Imani is one of two participants who use the term “missionary” to refer to the phenomenon we discuss here. She says:

---

30 Sharon is the other participant who uses the metaphor of the missionary to refer to this phenomenon. Her discussion of it will be partially taken up in Section 7.2.2.2.
Imani: I’m always upset with missionary workers—people who don’t see the difference between equity work and missionary work.

Philip: By missionary work I imagine you mean all the sort of aid and—

Imani: “I feel sorry for them, and let’s all do this for them and let’s do that for them.” I am not talking about people way off in wherever. I’m talking about that same attitude being imposed upon “these poor people,” people in their workplace and, you know, “I see all that and we have to do this for them,” which demands less of them and therefore cripples them.

Imani expresses her annoyance with those who interpret racial equity work as “doing for” others. She asserts that this approach is an imposition, inferiorizes those toward whom it is directed (“these poor people”), and denies and robs them of their agency (“cripples them”). Imani introduces the striking metaphor of the missionary, making comparisons between the type of approach to equity she describes and those religious interventions abroad that are not based on an understanding of a common human condition in which we are all embroiled, but rather upon a condescending feeling of moral obligation to rescue those who presumably cannot help themselves. Imani feels this missionary mentality is brought into racial equity work when it is done with the idea of doing for others.

Altruism is not, in itself, a dishonourable or inequitable social action, and in speaking about “doing for” I do not wish to seem to be in agreement with those reactionary conservatives who see the welfare state or society as somehow evil. However, where there is no understanding or critique of the structures and barriers that create those subjects who “do for” and those who are “done for,” and where there is no critique of the fact that this is very often a racial sorting, this type of altruism becomes a means of normalizing, legitimizing, and reifying inequitable social structures.
If these condescending approaches are unacceptable with respect to the Blacks on whose behalf the racial equity worker is advocating, they are certainly also unacceptable when they are introduced into the relationship between allies in racial equity work. Terrence and Imani reject these sentiments. Speaking as though addressing their white colleagues in racial equity work, they say:

**Imani:** So rather than empathizing, you’re sympathizing. I damn well don’t want your pity.

and:

**Terrence:** Don’t give me empathy or sympathy. I don’t need that! All I need from you is resource. I need the tools. When I say to you that’s what I need, I need you to say, “OK, I trust you. So no problem, I’ll give it to you.” That’s all!

These participants find patronizing, and strongly resent, when their white colleagues deal with them (or other Blacks) in terms that suggest pity, sympathy, or condescension—even when these dealings are engaged in with all good intention, as they often are. Missionary approaches stall or totally undermine true equity work, and often the focus is on the white person and her/his alleged benevolence rather than on truly unraveling racism and challenging whiteness. Maryam describes the way this operates in detail:

**Maryam:** Insecurity. And it’s deep! And what is amazing, those people can’t deny that as long as you stay in the small box they put you, they can love you, they can die for you, but if you stay in that small box. As long as you’re there! And I have faced that. I remember one of the persons who was in the government who was the program officer when I was in the community organization. I was well respected because I was doing a lot of work, real hard work. And I never came to the government because for me it was, “Forget about you!” And she knew me, that for her I was not the right Black, because I was not begging for a funder. She used to love all those Black African guys [clients] begging for money. And she was working on them—today smiling to this one, giving peanuts to that one, you know? Those people need to feel the power they can have from people. So, I think, when they can’t exercise that power within their own people, they try to do that with other people. And she—, with me she couldn’t because I was an insult because I couldn’t fit in any box. So she hated me.
Here, Maryam describes alliance relationships across lines of racial dominance that are based on the missionary approach. While the work being done is ostensibly racial equity work, and the government worker is in the position to support the work that the community organizations are doing, the terms of the relationships between the allies in this relationship uphold racial hierarchies. There is no effort to equalize the power imbalance, and where Blacks like Maryam are unwilling to abide by these terms, there can be no relationship. Evidently in this case, the power imbalance is the basis for the relationship, and secures this white woman’s sense of agency and benevolence as long as the power imbalance is held intact. This is consistent with Clark’s observation (cited and quoted in Rodriguez, 1999, n.p.) that

… some Whites view themselves as saviors. They only feel comfortable it they are working with people of color with a victim-focused identity. 
"That takes agency away from people of color," she says, adding that people of color have rarely been victims. "They have fought back for over 500 years."

Maryam shares more:

**Maryam:** She chose her people, you know the [Black] people she used to work on, you know, her little victims, you know? She gave them power and the opportunity to voice off their frustrations and [Maryam claps] it became a mess again.

**Philip:** Wow! What should she have done? I mean is it feedback that she was not taking or—?

**Maryam:** Yeah, she was not taking feedback and she was working in a field she has no abilities with, you know? She would better ask other people to advise her. She should have even anticipated the outcomes of such a project. … You have to anticipate the risks, and she didn’t anticipate. Oh, she was very stubborn: “It will work! It will work!” And she created a divide. And it’s so tough to fill a divide once it happens.

**Philip:** And you feel she genuinely wanted it to work but she just did the wrong things?
Maryam: Yeah, because it’s all about her; her helping the poor Black people. So it’s a kind of reverse racism, and, ah, she created much more mess than it used to be.

Of course, there is nothing “reverse” about this racism. It is simply racism. However, Maryam may be referring to the contradictory way that racial equity work is being used in this instance to sustain a racially inequitable social arrangement. Whatever power the white person may seem to have been sharing did not further the equity project, and she did not take advantage of the opportunity to be advised by Black colleagues who were more knowledgeable than her. Receiving such advice would have meant acknowledging the salience of Blacks’ knowledge and entering a mutually beneficial relationship—that is, a relationship on equal terms. Instead, we see the way that the inequitable relationship becomes a vehicle through which her sense of white dominance and exaggerated agency remain fully intact as she feels able to effect change on behalf of less privileged Blacks. Through this arrangement, the white person knows herself as superior, benevolent and even egalitarian.

Razack (2004, p. 9) writes about this effect of racial and colonial encounters to construct and bolster dominant identities, and the peculiar shape these take on in the Canadian context. Drawing on Du Bois’s (1903) metaphor of the colour line, and commenting on Canada’s international relations that are based on a similar dynamic, she asserts:

… we come to know ourselves in intimate ways through the colour line. A Canadian today knows herself or himself as someone who comes from the nicest place on earth, as someone from a peacekeeping nation, and as a modest, self-deprecating individual who is able to gently teach Third World Others about civility. … To unmake the colour line is to unmake ourselves. (Razack, 2004, p. 9)
Certainly, it is quite obvious that where they operate under these inequitable and inequity producing terms, any racial equity project is seriously compromised. The manufacture and maintenance of these conditions become a performance of whiteness. Therefore, the missionary approach described above is predisposed to fail at bringing about racial equity, not only because it is inherently condescending, but because through it dominant identities are created and reinforced through fantasies of benevolence—contrived acts of charity that maintain the fantasy of white superiority, innocence, and largesse.

Beverly gives us another view of how this “benevolence” might play out between colleagues in racial equity work:

**Beverly:** One of the things that I find, and it’s very subtle, I find that many Whites are willing to do things for you, but they’re not willing to have you do things for them. And it’s very interesting that they will offer to do a lot of things for you, but if you say, “Can I do that for you?” they will say, “Oh, no. It’s OK. It’s alright.” And that is the balance of power for me. For me, that is one way of holding the balance of power. Because, “I’m capable of doing for you, but you can’t do for me,” right? It’s as simple as getting out there and that person says, “Oh. Can I buy you a coffee?” And you say, “Oh, yes.” And [the next time] you say, “How about me buying you a coffee,” and the person, “Oh no. That’s alright.” Those are some things that for me are subtle, but it’s very important to me because that person or those people cannot be seen in a position where somebody is doing something for them. They always have to do for others. I see that from time to time, and I counteract it. I say, “Why don’t you do that and let me do this?” you know. See that’s why when I talk about Sheila and I, you know, like we go to the movie and we do things, or we go to the art gallery or whatever, and she’ll say, “Oh, I have tickets,” and I’ll say, “OK. I’ll buy dinner on our way to the movie,” you know, that kind of stuff. And for me it’s not a matter of, “Oh, I’ll pay my way and I will do that, and you pay your way and you do that.” When you have true interaction, it works both ways.

For Beverly, the ways in which some of her colleagues routinely resist allowing her to return small acts of kindness speak volumes to her about the quotidian ways that they establish and maintain a hierarchical relationship between themselves as Whites and her as a Black woman. It is not that she is unwilling to accept kindness from others. Rather,
she suggests that if the benevolence is only allowed to flow towards her rather than reciprocally between them, then the benevolence is not functioning to strengthen a relationship between colleagues on equal footing, but to cement an unequal distribution of power and status. Beverly shares with us what “true interaction”—that is, a genuinely equitable relationship—might look like by relating how she and Sheila Kristensen, her close white friend and colleague in racial equity work, have navigated that terrain by breaking down the colonial dynamic and practicing mutual generosity. There are, presumably, other ways of resisting colonial relationships between Black and white colleagues in racial equity work. What is important is that the allies be aware of the possibility of this colonial dynamic, and that they engage in a conscious, mindful praxis that subverts it. Suggestions about what this praxis might entail are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.2 Reciprocity, and expectations of gratitude

These condescending, “benevolent” stances that the participants tell us about may manifest themselves in yet another manner in racial equity work. Diane talks about what happens when white racial equity workers do, indeed, stick their necks out for the cause of racial equity and then experience reprisals for having done so:

**Diane:** There have been a few [white] people that I’ve worked with that have really gone the distance and gone out of their way to stand up, be counted all, of that kind of thing. I guess the down side to that is that—and I think if you talk to a lot of Black people, they’ll probably tell you this—is that when that happens and there are consequences to the white person—they’re being retaliated against, or they’ve lost some of the privilege of being white as a result of doing that—then you have to do the nurturing. You know, it’s expected that you’re going to hold their hand and commiserate about how terrible this is when that little episode is a very small part of their privileged life, and we live that every day. So, in some senses I resent it, but I recognize the value of having to do it. But we have
always, I think, always been nurturers as a people, and so we tend to be able to understand that they’re just not used to this oppression and it’s really bad and we should help them {laughs}. So, yes, I have a lot of trust in those people, but I also recognize that they’re not used to the oppression that they’ve received because of what they do, and therefore they think it’s my obligation to make it better.

Philip: Is it that you’ve become their community, or is it something else?

Diane: Ah, no. I think what it is, is the idea that as Black people we’re supposed to be grateful—even though that may be subconscious—that we’re supposed to be grateful for the effort they’ve put in on our behalf, as opposed to the recognition that you do that work because its socially redeeming work, and because it’s the right thing to do, not because the person or the group that you’re helping is obligated to you if you do it. And that’s the next step in the consciousness raising, that the white people who are truly dedicated haven’t gotten there yet. And in fact, I have on occasion said, “I don’t—. This is not my role. You know, I appreciate what you’ve done but it’s not my role to be eternally grateful, because the fact is you’re part of the oppressor group, and so you need to deal with that, I deal with it every day.”

This expectation of gratitude and nurture is raised by Sharon (as we will see below) as well as Diane, but none of the male participants in the study, pointing to the fact that this expectation is gendered as well as racialized. While it will to some extent affect all Blacks, it is likely to impact Black women more than Black men. This is because it articulates well with the enduring social structures constraining nonwhite women’s work. It appears, then, that when Diane says that Black people have “always been nurturers as a people” she may be referring to this social reality, and may be thinking particularly about Black women. The nurturer construction does not fit as well for Black men, who apart from the rather dated and discarded “Uncle Tom/Uncle Remus” stereotype have usually been constructed as violent and predatory.

It should certainly be a given that in racial equity coalitions, colleagues will support each other as they take on this risky work, and that this kind of support may sometimes involve encouraging and strengthening each other in the face of the
repercussions that come in the course of doing the work. However, whether this support will take place, and the form it will take, ought to depend on the quality of the personal relationships between the racial equity workers, and not on their racial identification.

Though Diane does offer this kind of support, and sees its importance in strengthening racial equity coalitions, she objects to the assumption that because she is Black it is her duty to be grateful and, therefore, she objects to assuming this arguably subordinate (racialized and gendered) position of the nurturer. In any case, if the white colleague understood racial inequity—its constant punishment of Nonwhites, and the fact that the privileges that Whites lose in doing racial equity work are seldom, if ever, afforded to Blacks in the first place—then certainly Blacks should at least be co-recipients rather than givers of nurture.

Thus, white racial equity workers who seem to be seeking or demanding gratitude from, and close relationships with, the racially oppressed based on their decision to challenge racism demonstrate a poor understanding of the whiteness and racial inequity that the work opposes. Gratitude from Blacks is not an appropriate expectation. Diane suggests that Whites should undertake racial equity work because of its moral “correctness” rather than to become the “friend of the Blacks,” and their reward should flow from having done the right thing. The emphasis should be upon the “qualitative value of justice” (Dei, 2008c, p. xv).

Sharon also weighs in on this matter of gratitude:

**Sharon:** And I’m also aware, the way that these things are organized, you’re not supposed to criticize them. You’re supposed to be grateful. There’s people who become untouchable because of the way that they are positioned. And so there’s this natural expectation of gratitude, and when it’s not forthcoming, it’s all about, “What’s wrong with you?” and “Let’s go no further. Let’s go no further.” But we have to get past that. Why should I be naturally grateful for the fact that he’s a
[racial equity worker] representing the interest of African people on this issue? I respect him, but, you know, Western countries of which he’s a member, are implicated in creating the conditions for—. And so, when we dig deeper, hmm, I’m not jumping up and down here.

Sharon points to an even more disturbing dimension of the expectation of gratitude whereby disapproval is directed at the Black person who is understood as ungrateful, and whereby the racial equity work may be discontinued as a result. Sharon also indicates that this dynamic places the white racial equity worker beyond critique to the extent that criticism from the Black racial equity worker might be construed as ingratitude.

These expectations of gratitude of which the participants speak, and the fantasies of benevolence upon which they are founded, can only grow out of a gross misunderstanding or misreading of the racial landscape, serving as evidence that those who hold to them have little or no critical understanding of history, of present racial arrangements, or of whiteness, but, instead, subscribe to hegemonic interpretations of racial/colonial realities. Benevolence speaks of the kind of act that is not based on obligation or social responsibility, but rather upon voluntary generosity. To construe racial equity work as benevolence toward Blacks and, therefore, to demand gratitude is to misrepresent the events and processes that bring about the racial inequity we purport to challenge, and to completely overlook the implication of white bodies in creating these conditions and in harvesting privilege from them. This misconstruing of one’s implication in inequitable relations of race paints unearned privilege as fortuity, and supplants the more appropriate motives of responsibility and accountability with notions of innocence and largesse.
6.2.3 **Conclusion**

I have argued in this section that where white racial equity workers display “missionary” attitudes and expectations of gratitude in racial equity work, they (perhaps inadvertently) re-inscribe inequitable relations of race within the very contexts that exist to challenge them. Ku (2008) has stated:

> For dominant subjects, their failure to understand how racism works within structures and how they are complicit in the maintenance of such structures can only erode their credibility where they attempt to do transformative anti-racist work. (p. 22)

She is quite correct. However, it is not just that their credibility is eroded, but also that it is impossible for truly transformative results to emerge from any ostensible racial equity work engaged in under these circumstances. As Sharon suggests, when the proper understandings of the ontology of race and whiteness are in place, the sense of benevolence is replaced by one of accountability and responsibility—much more fruitful ground upon which to found racial equity work.

6.3 **Actively or Passively Defending White Supremacy: Abstract Liberalism within Racial Equity Work**

To introduce this section, I begin with an excerpt from Sharon’s interview where she shares an experience wherein a white client became upset with her for daring to compare his upcoming trip to Europe to her recent trip to Africa. The client subsequently complained to her white supervisor. In this instance, Sharon expects her white supervisor colleague to stand with her in the face of this incident so clearly based in the client’s racist views of Africa. This is not what happens:

**Sharon:** [My supervisor] said, you know, “This young man is really offended, you know, and here’s why.” And, you know, he said to me, “You know, Sharon,
it’s all b**s**t, and you and I know that, but you may just want to call him in and say you’re sorry.”

So I said, “Well why would I do that?”

And his rationale was “Well you know you have to understand these kids are really sensitive and they’re poor. They don’t have much money. They don’t have a lot of prospects and so you have to be, as a trainer/counselor,”—which was what I was in the program—“you have to be careful. You have to be sensitive about their self-esteem because it’s already low.”

So I said, “Mike, that’s not gonna happen. It’s not gonna happen.” …

So he said, “Well, you know, I told him to wait,” blah, blah, blah. So then for me, the assumption was, “So you had already decided that you were going to direct me to apologize to him!” … So I said, “Well, you know, I’m not gonna apologize. So?” … So, I left his office and I don’t know what he said to the young guy, but we never had a conversation about it again. And I lost respect for him that day and he knew it.

The racist nature of the incident with the client could hardly have been clearer, but Sharon’s colleague fails to call the incident what it is and address the client about it. Instead, he asks Sharon to apologize in the face of this insult, claiming that he is choosing this course of action so as not to damage the youth’s self-esteem. It is difficult not to see this as a simple lack of the courage or moral fortitude to challenge racism. Apparently, it was easier for him to stand in solidarity with whiteness than stand against racial inequity. Sharon immediately lost respect for her colleague.

As it turns out, the white supervisor in this incident is not a racial equity worker, and the work that Sharon was doing was not racial equity work, but the incident illustrates the kind of support for whiteness that is all too common in Canadian society and within organizational culture. The interesting thing to note is that this is often performed by Whites who claim to abhor racism. Such are the contradictions of liberal individualist culture or “abstract liberalism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b, p. 26) which several race scholars have expounded (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2003b; Dei, 1996a; Goldberg, 1993; Henry & Tator, 1994; Razack, 1998b) albeit they have used different labels to refer to the
Within the ideological climate of this “abstract liberalism” dominant subjects are able to live within and defend the inequitable racial status quo, all the while maintaining their fantasies of personal, national and societal egalitarianism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b, p. 26; Henry & Tator, 1994).

The phenomenon that I will discuss in this section, which the participants experience in their racial equity alliances, flows from this larger ideological context in which the work often takes place. This particular feature of whiteness is relevant to the present study because, paradoxically, it often manifests itself within the very sites that claim to challenge racism. Since some Whites who enter racial equity work are of a wide range of motivations in the first place (see Sections 3.1.6 and 6.4), whiteness and its investment in the racial status quo are factors that cannot be ignored in these contexts. This section discusses how whiteness operates within racial equity circles to effectively stall the racial equity work and condemn it to an unproductive loop that does not advance the work. This involves a) patterns of avoidance behaviour that demonstrate a reluctance to name and interrupt racism and to make tough or unpopular calls as necessary, and b) focusing more on the process of doing racial equity work rather than on the desired outcomes of that work.

6.3.1 Patterns of Avoidance and Failing to Stand Up for Racial Equity

One of the interview questions in this study asked the participants to describe an instance in which they and a white colleague in racial equity work disagreed about a course of action or strategy. A number of these disagreements seemed to arise where the Black racial equity workers felt that their colleagues preferred to take a “soft” approach toward challenging racism or toward other Whites who were undermining the antiracism
project. To the participants, a commitment to racial equity work implies a commitment to make these hard calls. Certainly, then, it is particularly vexing to them when their white colleagues fail to step up to the plate in these crucial moments. This behaviour seems to place racial equity work in an inappropriate second place to other concerns—a particularly inappropriate strategy if those concerns are the white racial equity workers’ own “safety.”

Beverly speaks of one of her colleagues who, while occupying a racial equity position, simply avoids getting into situations where he might have to name racism when it is occurring:

**Philip:** Could you describe a white person that you worked with who you thought was a poor ally in fighting racism, and let me know what made him or her a poor ally. Just remember that we’re talking about somebody who was actually supposed to be expressly fighting racism …

**Beverly:** *[laughs]* Oh, you know, I could go back to the person who took over from me. I think that he meant good, but once—. Antiracist work is not just paper work. It’s practical interaction with people. And I know that at that time when I was in the position, parents could call me if they were having a difficulty in school. I would mediate the situation. I would go out. I would set up workshops and the rest of it. Well once, the person who took over from me said that he didn’t work with parents; he worked with the teachers and didn’t work with parents. So antiracist work became paper work, you know, instead of that practical mediation and all that stuff. And I think that things kind of took a backseat where that was concerned.

When Beverly occupied the position, she would work with (nonwhite) parents who had complaints about the school system and who charged it with inequity in order to negotiate workable solutions that those parent felt were fair and equitable. In contrast, her successor avoids having to do this by re-defining the role. In so doing, he avoids the uncomfortable position of possibly having to validate any legitimate complaints that
parents might have against his white educator colleagues. Again, this smacks of a white racial solidarity that takes priority over the imperative to interrupt racism.

Quentin’s experience of the same phenomenon is one that took place within an equity workshop he was delivering with his white colleague. He tells of a particularly obnoxious participant in the workshop who constantly and inappropriately undermined not only the presenters, but also the equity principles they were trying to teach.

**Quentin:** So finally, I lost it. And so, this is where Kirk [his white colleague] and I disagreed. I just said [to the participant], “You gotta go!” I said, “I’m asking you to leave this session. Obviously you’re not—. I consider you as a bully.” And I went on and on and on. And maybe I did go too far because I was a little hard on him. And I’m standing in front of him, and I’m going, “Well now if this guy jumps up, he wants to grab ahold of me, well,” you know? It was to that point. Because I was thinking as I was talking, “If he does get up, am I gonna go to the left or go to the right, and will I swing back at this guy, or what will I do?” And it’s one of those things, even though you’re talking you’re getting ready for some kind of evasive action. So, I had my say, and you could hear a pin drop in the room. Nobody said anything. He didn’t move. He just stood there and stared at me, and me looking at him.

And my white co-facilitator got up and said {clapping}, “That’s it. I think it’s an appropriate time for us to have a break.” And so everybody went out on break.

And Kirk said, “Well,” he said, “Could you have held off any longer?” And I said, “No.” I said, “I think this was an appropriate exit point for this gentleman. He’s hindering the learning experience for all of his co-workers.”

And Kirk said, “Well maybe he is, but maybe we could have held on until the end of the day.”

I said, “No.” I said, “It was time for him to go and he had to be told.” And so we disagreed on that.

**Philip:** Did you ever come to see eye-to-eye? Did you resolve that?

**Quentin:** We seen eye-to-eye afterward because now, on reflection, he agreed with me now. He agrees with that.

The behaviour of the white colleague in this instance is not as disturbing as some we have seen in this section, but it is not simply a difference of opinion about how to approach a difficult situation. To Quentin, his colleague is failing to interrupt white racism, and is
sacrificing the goals of the workshop. Waiting until the end of the day to address the heckler would have meant continuing to try to share important equity knowledge in a poisoned and disrespectful environment which subverts antiracism knowledge and sabotages the desired outcomes of sharing it. Instead, because of Quentin’s intervention, the session was able to run smoothly and the conditions for participant learning were enhanced. The heckler stayed, but was no longer disruptive. Quentin does not defend the tone of his intervention, but he does insist that the intervention was necessary. Quentin reports being thanked and commended by one of the workshop participants for interrupting this man, whose inappropriate behaviour was apparently his habit in all equity workshops and apparently caused others to avoid these sessions. Thus, Quentin’s decision was the appropriate one for advancing the equity cause.

This excerpt is also significant in that it reveals the considerable personal risk to which Quentin exposed himself in order to confront this man who he describes as “about six foot six, big man, and very dominating … huge man, muscular. Not fat, but just well put together. And I’m not a very big man.” The kind of risk—both physical and social—that he and other Black equity workers are willing to take for the sake of the work contrasts with what, to them, seems like the cowardice of their white colleagues. Imani speaks of an incident where the risk is more social than physical:

**Philip:** Could you describe a white person that you felt, that you worked with on antiracism issues, that was a poor ally, and tell me why they were not—?

**Imani:** Because sometimes when they get uncomfortable and their back gets up against a wall, they circle the wagon and they become one of the audience, and they leave you out there on your own. And that’s the one that I could think of. Very well intentioned except wasn’t accustomed to carrying the heat, and had less at stake.

**Philip:** Could you tell me more about that?
Imani: Yeah, you know, for me it’s a passion. It’s an issue. It’s real, you know. … You’re passionate about it and if you come up against a roadblock, you’re not stupid. You’re gonna find a way around it. If you have to back up a little bit, you’re gonna do it with a little bit of care. You’re gonna expect some support. But sometimes, they get scared by the opposition of their own and they join the opposition. They don’t come right out; they just leave you there to take it and sort of smile. And, you say, “You got nothing to lose.”

Philip: Mm hm. So they’re not risking anything is what you’re saying.

Imani: Well they’re not risking. Some will—but a lot of them will, they’ll back off or they’ll become the missionary. You know, “Well we have to worry about how Imani feels.” Well you don’t have to worry about what Imani feels. Worry about what Imani is saying. And I’ve always made it very clear to them I am not interested in my feelings. I’m interested in somebody not being rude to me as a person, but I can take care of myself where that is concerned. But sometimes—, and it makes me nervous. Because you know that sometimes it’s done by very well-intentioned people. That’s why I prefer to do it on my—, or control the subject, because you don’t need your partner becoming their ally. What? What’s this?

Philip: And that person becomes their ally by just not stepping forward when they should?

Imani: Well by pulling out; leaving you there to take the heat; saying {mockingly} “Well that’s another point of view. Well I guess I can see your point. Oh, I guess—,” you know? That kind of stuff. I have no respect for that. None.

There are a number of important aspects to this excerpt. The first point is that Imani claims that this behaviour comes from a white colleague who is “very well-intentioned.” Clearly, one does not only expect this from those who are insincere or who are not really convinced of the need for racial equity work, but from the sincere also.

The second point offers a possible explanation. As a Black person Imani is directly affected by existing racial inequity, and she also expresses her desire to make things at least somewhat more equitable for her own children. These things are the source of her deep commitment to racial equity work. Imani points out that her colleague
has less at stake. Consequently, when the social risk increases as it does in this instance because of the threat of white backlash, this colleague is less prone to stand up to it for the racial equity cause. We note that Imani is not unaware of the risk and understands the need to strategize judiciously in the face of this kind of threat. What she does not support is abandoning the racial equity cause in order to evade the threat. This represents a reneging on the commitment to racial equity. What is also clear is the white person’s privilege to decide to engage in or back out of racial equity work with no concern about the long-term consequences of abdicating the responsibility to resist racial inequity.

The third point is that in this situation the white colleague not only fails to stand in solidarity with Imani, but chooses to stand with the Whites opposing Imani’s racial equity message. Further, the colleague slips into the condescending “missionary” discourse discussed earlier in this chapter. The fact that “missionary” discourse is an approach to which a white equity worker may resort in an attempt to avoid interrupting white racism supports the assertion that “missionary” approaches, despite their veneer of benevolence, are rooted in whiteness. Imani’s feelings of betrayal are multiplied, and, like Sharon, Imani loses respect for her colleague.

A final example of a white colleague undermining the racial equity project by avoiding action is offered by Terrence and occurs in an organizational context:

**Terrence:** There’s been many instances where I wanted to do something, and colleagues disagreed. Presently, my biggest fight is that I wanna conduct something called a diversity climate survey to measure the level of inclusiveness in the bottom part of the organization. Not the executive, but the rest of the 30 000 employees. In doing the inclusiveness survey, I wanna ask questions about demographics, because if I ask a question in the survey, “Do you feel that there is no discrimination,” and I have a response of 70% of people who say “I feel there is no discrimination,” that doesn’t tell me anything. What I need to know is how many Black people answered that question, how many South Asians answered that question, how many Caucasians answered that question. And are there group
differences between Blacks, Caucasian, South Asian, Chinese, Korean. Then, I have something. But I have a colleague who thinks this would be a public relations nightmare, so did not want to do it. This is one where I am fighting tooth and nail, and I’m not gonna give up. I’d rather not do the survey, than to do the survey without having the demographic questions. And the public relations nightmare is lo and behold we should discover that Blacks in this place think that this is the most racist place they’ve ever worked in. What do we do then? So we’d rather not know than know. That is a clear discussion that is happening now, and I’m still at the fight, and haven’t given up yet.

Philip: So is there any key to resolving these? Because this one’s not yet resolved.

Terrence: On this one, the key to resolution may be to appeal to higher up, because if you heard me describe some of my executive colleagues earlier, I’m pretty sure he will say, “You’re right, Terrence.” He’s the kind of person who doesn’t round corners. [He would say] “I want to know what I don’t know. And if this place has a bad culture, I want to know about it, and see how do I deal with it.” But in the system there are gate-keepers. And it’s their job for things like that not to happen.

In this example, Terrence speaks of a colleague who would rather that any racial inequity and discontent remain hidden and persist, than risk uncovering it and face the implications. In this case the threat comes from the media, which routinely treat racism as though it were exceptional, and therefore paint as evil those institutions courageous enough to address the ways that societal racism manifests in organizations as microcosms of racially inequitable society. In order to avoid the media circus, Terrence’s colleague prefers to sacrifice this opportunity to move the racial equity project forward. Terrence disdainfully refers to this as gate-keeping, drawing attention to the way in which this behaviour maintains the racial status quo. In contrast, he commends his other white colleague who he feels would rather take the risks in order to do the right thing.

Thus, whether it is through soft-stepping or avoidance, and whether it is for self-preservation or the preservation of a false organizational reputation, the Black racial equity workers in this study are intolerant of their white colleagues when they fail to use
their power, positions, privilege and the trust that has been invested in them in the racial equity role to make the hard calls against racism when the necessity to do so arises. They sacrifice the racial equity cause and subordinate it to other concerns, among them apparently, their own comfort and that of other Whites. These instances betray a lack of commitment to the racial equity cause but, further, also represent a willingness to close ranks with whiteness in those moments when standing up for racial equity may matter most. These avoidance measures, then, suggest that when the going gets tough, these white racial equity workers choose whiteness over racial equity, supporting white dominance through the very sites that claim to challenge it.

6.3.2 The Stalling Game: Privileging Process over Outcome.

This phenomenon of failing to make hard calls in particular crucial moments when such a call is necessary can be generalized from the individual level to entire racial equity projects. Here, the Black racial equity workers feel that the way that certain racial equity initiatives are conceived and organized makes them such that they are unproductive. They feel that some Whites who they work with on these racial equity projects are complicit with locking the racial equity initiatives into a stalling pattern whereby process takes priority over outcome and/or where it is felt that having legislation and racial equity goals in place is sufficient without accountability measures. For the participants, these patterns seem like a simple lack of commitment to racial equity and/or lack of the will to bring about racial equity. Again, there seems to be an unwillingness to use social power to advance the racial equity cause at times when this may make other Whites uncomfortable. Imani gives a description of exactly what the stalling pattern might look like:
Imani: And I think the fact that it’s become a role … may justify some of the behaviours which stall effecting equity. I mean they have us do, or they do research, and then they *update* the research, then the research is out of date and so they do *more* research, then they *analyse* the research, then they pay money for all of that which takes it out of the pot for *implementing* the research. And even when they implement it, they find a way of drawing up a *model* or processes in order to implement—which takes more money, *and* more time—it’s all called stall. And so you’ve got this model, and then they *study* the model and *analyse* the model, and then *present* the model, and they *critique* the model—takes more time. You see, what prevents equity is not the absence of a model, the absence of research, the absence—. It’s the absence of *will* to effect it *{laughs}*.

Here, Imani makes connections between the stalling pattern and the existence of formal racial equity roles. She suggests that these roles actually generate demands for particular types of formal activities that are presumed (and may indeed be) necessary, but which can also become ends in themselves, and be used to draw attention and resources away from achieving racial equity. I would suggest that what is occurring here is an outgrowth of the political function of these racial equity roles within organizations and a racially inequitable society governed by abstract liberalist ideology. The vacuous commitment to racial equity represented by this ideology leads to assumptions that, ontologically, organizations and Euro-North American societies in general are racially equitable. The resulting rush to make declarations to this effect take place without the organization or society having to take any particular steps to ensure that this is indeed the case. Consequently, the existence of the racial equity role within an organization supersedes what one might assume would be the purpose of the role. In this context, the racial equity role functions as a badge intended to *proclaim* that the organization (and society) takes racism seriously and is racially equitable rather than as an internal regulatory role charged with charting the organization’s progress toward racial equity, with transforming its racially inequitable structures, and with taking measures against acts of racial bigotry.
Thus, paradoxically, certain racial equity sites are very much characterized by the absence of a commitment to changing the status quo or actually achieving racial equity outcomes.

Terrence gives us more information about what this lack of commitment looks like with respect to hiring and employment:

**Terrence:** But there’s a plethora of people who say they believe in employment equity, but they don’t take any form of action, [or] in any way initiate. And the worst place for that is my previous place of employment. If you consider that my previous place of employment has been at this since 1986. We are in 2006. And look at the representation of visible minorities in executive positions. It’s laughable. It’s because most of them do not really believe in this.

Terrence points out that in twenty years this organization has not been able to significantly address the problem of the scarcity of Blacks and other people of Colour in its higher ranks. There are few other organizational departments within which this lack of tangible results after so long a time would not be considered a gross failure and a call to action. However, the participants seem to indicate that this is routine with respect to racial equity departments and endeavours. Not surprisingly, this stark instance of abstract liberalism whereby equity is claimed but not lived is explained away with that hallmark of the discourse that is, meritocratic thinking, which refuses to see the structurally determined privileges for some and punishments for others that make the possibility of a meritocracy all but impossible. Terrence goes on to indicate the flaws in that argument:

**Terrence:** And they will throw a word at you, which has been thrown here at me, that I was always deeply offended whenever I hear the word. It was somebody [who said], “Well we hire based on merit. You know, we need to hire based on merit. So then under employment equity we have to hire based on merit.” And it was to suggest that when we hired Black people, it wasn’t on merit. If really, there was meritocracy in my previous place of employment, you would not need employment equity, unless you were to conclude that Blacks were not as smart or as capable? It’s because there is no meritocracy that makes it such that all you see at the top is white.
Philip: Of course, their argument would be that, “Well, you know, it’s because we’ve had a history of racism. Nothing that’s going on now. But a history of racism that unfortunately some people haven’t had the opportunities to be educated at the levels, and ta ta ta ta.” And it goes on.

Terrence: Well this is where the argument doesn’t stand. The history of discrimination: I bought it in 1986, 87, 88. In 2006, I don’t buy it anymore. Because you will hear, invariably, that visible minorities are more highly educated than Canadian born. And you will see also that we have developed a generation of leaders that are accumulating five, six, seven degrees plus work experience. The thing about my previous place of employment that’s different than anywhere else is that they’re still paying lip service to it. They look at diversity and employment equity as a process, not as an outcome. Other organizations see employment equity as an outcome, not as a process. And that’s the major difference between the two worlds.

Available statistics on people of Colour in Canada shows that they are generally better educated than the average Canadian. Using this information, Terrence undermines the notion of meritocracy that is used to explain away racial inequity in hiring.

Terrence also shows how an undue focus on the process rather than the outcomes of racial equity work perfectly serves the political balance struck by abstract liberalist ideologies of race between claiming to oppose racism on the one hand and maintaining the status quo of white supremacy on the other. Imani makes a similar observation with respect to the education system:

Philip: There’s this activity—I don’t know if you know of it—Cross the Line. “Cross the line if you’ve ever been discriminated against; Cross the line because of this—.”

Imani: That’s what I’m telling you. That’s process. That’s how they process it to death. And then they have activities, you see, and you never get to the meat of, “Hey, you know what? You’re serving an area that is 76% racially different and you have nobody in this school. I want you to find me a good teacher who is

---

31 According to 2001 Canadian Census data, roughly equal proportions of Blacks 25-44 years of age (57.2%) as of all Canadians 25-44 years of age (57.6%) had attained some form of post secondary qualifications. If visible minorities are taken as a whole, their percentages of the population 25-44 years of age having post-secondary qualifications (60.2%) exceeds the Canadian average (Statistics Canada, 2008/2003)
racially other.” You see, that’s what the superintendent should be saying is, “Find them! And then keep finding them! But you see you don’t have to say that if they’re gonna do it, but that—, those activities, that’s part of this “research and then the study,” and then the da da di dat da dat. It’s called stall! It’s called stall!

Here Imani, like Terrence, illustrates how the focus on process and sensitivity training draws attention away from putting in place the strategies that will truly dismantle racial inequity and bring about equitable results and representation levels (see, e.g., Srivastava & Francis, 2006). Note that Imani is careful to point out, where she says that the imperative should be “find me a good teacher,” that this does not, and need not, entail lowering any employment standards. Like Terrence, she challenges the assertion that the lack of proportional representation in employment is mostly because of a lack of qualified people of Colour.

As a final illustration of the participant’s frustration with privileging process over outcome, witness James’s opinion:

**James:** The racial equity evaluation work has been going on for many years. Traditionally, they’ve always had a white person here—could be a woman or a man, doesn’t make a difference—ah, till I came along and I came to the conclusion very quickly, within a month, that the process was flawed because the process was heavy on process as opposed to looking for results. In other words, yes, we did have a way of doing the evaluation which placed emphasis on a process, but hasn’t really generated and led to significant results. So, I am trying to change that to make it more meaningful so it can lead to representation levels.

James claims that in contrast to the white racial equity workers before him, he quickly realized that the racial equity work was stalled and needed for its emphasis to be shifted from the process to the outcomes.

The participants’ discussion of the stalling and focusing on process rather than outcome draws attention to competing paradigms for achieving racial equality, paradigms
that Crenshaw (1988) refers to in her discussion of United States antidiscrimination law as the expansive and restrictive views. Crenshaw writes:

The expansive view stresses equality as a result, and looks to real consequences for African-Americans. It interprets the objective of antidiscrimination law as the eradication of the substantive conditions of Black subordination and attempts to enlist the institutional power of the courts to further the national goal of eradicating the effects of racial oppression. The restrictive view, which exists side by side with this expansive view, treats equality as a process, downplaying the significance of actual outcomes. The primary objective of anti-discrimination law, according to this vision, is to prevent future wrong-doing rather than to redress present manifestations of past injustice. ‘Wrongdoing’, moreover is seen primarily as isolated actions against individuals rather than as societal policy against an entire group. (pp. 1341-1342)

Crenshaw points out that focus on the restrictive view, that is, on process, is at the expense of the expansive view, and ultimately at the expense of eliminating racial inequity.

As we investigate how this overarching ideological climate is put into action through individuals, we note that it is not the fact that this inertia exists and impinges upon their work that the study participants find frustrating. After all, this is the nature of contemporary racism and this is what the participants expect to have to combat. Rather, what they find exasperating is the failure of their white colleagues in racial equity work to recognize and challenge this stalling, and therefore the abstract liberal race ideology that supports it. Why is it that their colleagues in racial equity work who claim to oppose racism are so easily drawn into channeling this inertia and this ideology? Hence in the following excerpt, we see James describing why he found one of his white colleagues ineffective:

**James:** Well there was one guy who was working here with me—very smart. He spent quite a lot of time in equity work—he keeps saying 20 years ’til about a few months ago when he moved on to another department. And I found him very ineffective because he believed that all the solutions to our problems could be
solved by legislation. And I have a different opinion, and I don’t think so. You cannot legislate social change. Racial equity work is really dealing with social change. You can use legislation to create the environment for racial equity work to flourish, but you cannot use legislation as the sole means of making things happen. And that’s where he was coming from, and that’s where him and I disagreed. We had a lot of arguments on this. So I felt he was very ineffective.

James describes here the trap of putting legislation and policies in place without accompanying accountability measures. Once again, this represents the privileging of process over outcome, and ultimately an unwillingness to institute uncomfortable measures. He points to his colleague’s commitment to this unbalanced approach to racial equity work and the way that it is complicit with stalling racial equity work. Interestingly enough, James’s point of reference is the same organization that Terrence says has been working at racial equity in this domain for twenty years. This twenty years coincides perfectly with the twenty years this white racial equity worker had been doing this work. Clearly, this white racial equity worker has not made the clear connections between the organization’s lack of progress toward racial equity in this time period and his own and the organization’s approach to achieving it. This is a perfect example of the way that the existence of racial equity roles is an end in itself. No doubt, over the twenty years, this white racial equity worker’s job has occupied him with the “research and then the study,” and then the da da di dat da dat” of which Imani speaks, but there has been no progress and no interrogation of the lack of progress.

If a major part of challenging racism is understanding it as structural and challenging the abstract liberal ideology that is constitutive of it, then it is reasonable for Black racial equity workers to expect their white allies to challenge that ideology as it rears its hostile head within the racial equity context to produce these stalling patterns. The participants’ annoyance with their white colleagues is related to the fact that they
either do not recognize abstract liberalism within racial equity work (which would suggest their lack of qualification to be in a racial equity role) or choose not to resist this ideology where it presents itself within racial equity work (which suggests their lack of commitment to the racial equity cause).

Sharon makes the assumption that it is Whites’ tendency to fail to grasp fully the effects of abstract liberalism’s reasonable-sounding justifications of the racial status quo that is at work here, and she relates this to their racial location within the racial landscape:

**Sharon:** And this is why I say that not everybody can do antiracism work. It’s a skill. You have to have a lot of knowledge, and you have to be able to think very carefully, and you have to understand history to be able to have these conversations, right? You [the white person] could easily be persuaded, I think, if you tried to have that conversation at your dinner table or with the Chief of Police or whatever, wherever you find yourself, you could easily be persuaded that your position is off, you know what I mean? You could easily be persuaded that this is not the way that you’re supposed to see the world. If you’re not trained and you don’t understand what all of that means, or how people talk about these things, or why it’s so difficult for them to hear, you will shut down or you will fall into a trap where you will do more damage than you are even aware of to begin with. … the question is, “Then how do you get white folks to a place where they can do that type of critical work? What avenues do you create to build that kind of critical mass?” … I think the history of racism and the way that it’s lived is so deeply organized that when even well-meaning white folks, at the end of the day, they’re on the cusp, that sense of giving up privilege—. [Privilege] is too, it’s too, it’s too sweet! It’s *too sweet!*

While the need for training in order to come to a stable critical understanding of the workings of racial ideologies in Euro-North American societies is certainly not limited to white bodies, Sharon suggests that the white racial equity worker’s investment in, and benefiting from, the system of white privilege interferes with the likelihood of their being able to consistently hold such a critical position. As with the patterns of avoidance discussed above, as the stakes get higher in terms of the extent of challenge to the status
quo, the Black racial equity workers see their white colleagues’ tendency to capitulate increase. According to Sharon, the seduction of their white privilege is almost irresistible.

Admittedly, this study cannot be said to involve a statistically representative sample, and the voices of white racial equity workers are not directly represented in the study, however the Black racial equity workers in this study seem to invest less in the strategy of “sensitivity training” than in creating accountability structures that will bring about racial equity. In contrast, they report that their white colleagues tend to invest in process rather than outcome; “sensitivity training” rather than accountability measures; “restrictive” rather than “expansive” views (Crenshaw, 1988, pp. 1341-1342) of racial equity. In the participants’ opinion, this represents a lukewarm commitment to racial equity and a lack of political or moral will. After all, our societies do not deal with the abuses we are outraged about (such as, say, child molestation) in this manner. Where the society is convinced of the egregiousness of a particular practice, it attacks it with all aggressiveness and the accountability measures that are necessary to end it. Where it does not happen we can usually assume some kind of political or moral impasse.

In great contrast, the participants express their own willingness to institute firm measures to achieve racial equity goals and end stalling patterns. On this point, James tells me:

**Philip:** Have you ever gotten into a situation where you ended up bringing the hammer down on anyone?

**James:** Well you’ll be glad to hear that for—, the program has been in existence for several years. The evaluation process itself has been here for several years and they have never done it. The new process I’m putting in place would ensure that we do it. Oh yes! *Philip laughs* No, no, no. I have not made a secret of that. Everybody knows that about me now. I say, “Yes, I’m gonna make sure that we
enforce the rules.” Because, you see, all those requirements and rules are in the law. We have not enforced it. And I’m saying to my people, “You know what? We are gonna start enforcing those things in the law. They look at me like I’m crazy. I said, “No, no. I’m not! Because you guys you’ve been taking five years to complete one evaluation, which is nonsense. So I’m saying you’re going to finish that evaluation in eight months and if they don’t meet the requirements we’re gonna take action against them.” And they say, “James, are you ready for this?” And I say, “I’m just following what is in there [the law].”

James seeks to use the authority he has to advance the racial equity cause by setting deadlines and following up with punitive action as necessary. His approach is so unusual in this context that his white colleagues think he is “crazy.” Their question about whether he is ready for this seems to indicate their own fears of the backlash that might result if he actually goes the next step in ensuring that the racial equity policies that are in place are respected. In James’s opinion he is safe because he is only follow through on the organization’s ostensible claim to racial equity as expressed through its policies.

Imani has also used her authority to bring about racial equity outcomes even where this may require strict accountability measures. She shares this in the following lengthy but important excerpt:

**Imani:** It’s all premised on this issue that if people learn about it, if we educate them, then they will not do it. And I don’t believe that. I think people won’t do what they can’t do—what they are punished for, either economically, financially, or with jobs, or with the removal of jobs, the removal of status, whatever that appropriate ruling is relative to their status and their place of employment. People won’t do what they can’t do, and moreover research here again has proven that people will begin to speak in support of the ways they must act. Because it’s very difficult to constantly badmouth behaviours that you must perform—in most circumstances. And there are those who do it, but it’s very difficult. So people begin to support verbally ways in which they must act. And more than that, the fact that they have to act in a certain way means that they are becoming accustomed to circumstances and behaviours to which they were not formerly accustomed. That is not education. That is training. It is imposition. It is determination.
Philip: And how often are you able—just as a side to that question—how often do you find in your work that you’re able to actually get, you know, go the way of imposition rather than the way of—?

Imani: Well as a principal I did it. I said, you know, “It’s a very inclusive school. We have Vietnamese children, we have Black children, we have South American children.” We had children from everywhere. And I said, you know, “I wanna see them in your lessons as you use the curriculum of the Board. I wanna see examples of how you can integrate that.”

And if it wasn’t there I would be looking, evaluating their work within classrooms, and said, “It just isn’t happening. You’re not following the rules. You’re not following the plan,” you know. Black History Month came and I said, “Where’s the work you’re doing?”

“Oh, I’m integrating it all year round.”

“Fine let me see that. If you’re integrating it all year round, that’s terrific.” You know, Chinese New year came, “OK. So what are you doing?” Ha! And you see it. And when you don’t see it, I say—

You know, [they would say], “This is a poor neighbourhood. These kids can’t learn to read.”

“Oh really? Well if they don’t learn to read, I’m coming for you! I’m gonna evaluate you! I wanna know what you’re doing to give them the support.” And so consequently, when provincial accountability testing came our kids did fine, better than some of the middle-upper class schools, you know.

And the superintendent said, “Oh,” you know.

And I said, “Our kids are poor, not stupid!”

Without doubt, Imani’s stance did not make her popular among the teachers under her supervision, however she did not refrain from using her power to bring about meaningful change. Her interventions resulted in the opportunity for nonwhite children to be reflected in school curriculum, and ultimately in these students’ scholastic success. Like James, Imani will not be stalled by the fear of causing discomfort. The moral imperative is too important.

As a final note in this section, the participants realize that despite their intentions and readiness to “stir the pot,” Black racial equity workers may also be constrained by the abstract liberal racial ideologies that frame their work. In certain instances, they too are
trapped in the activities that stall progress toward racial equity. Imani speaks about doing racial equity workshops and training:

**Imani:** When you’re standing there talking about this and you’re thinking, *whispering* “This is stupid! *regular volume* This is so—. It, it’s real—. It almost makes it seem as though the fact that you were teaching it legitimizes it, that it’s necessary to teach it, you know what I mean? When *really, you know* this is a tennis match you’re having. *I* teach it and pretend it’s necessary to teach it. *You*, on the other hand, pretend that it’s necessary to learn it, and we both know it’s all an obstacle course where you’re *stalling* to do something you’re unwilling to do. And you get tired. You get very tired. And that’s the game. And you’re in the game because you know that at least you’re holding it in their faces. And we soothe our aches and pains by saying, “Well, you know, if only one person is learning it.” And we—yeah, I guess you have to find a way to get up and do it tomorrow *Philip laughs*. I mean, you know, so that’s what you do. That’s what you do. You count those little things.

According to Imani, Black racial equity workers do the “sensitivity training” aspect of the work where there are opportunities to do so with the hope that they will, indeed, succeed in changing the attitudes of at least a few. They understand the need for this to be balanced with other types of interventions, but where this is all they have the space do, they may resign themselves to doing it, motivating themselves by the faint hope that someone will gain a more critical perspective on race and racism. This possibility, however slim, makes the opportunity to deliver such workshops something they usually will not pass up. Diane’s perspective sums this up:

**Diane:** as much as I sort of rail against having to teach white people about oppression, the fact is that as a Black person you constantly have to point it out. I mean, I think it’s our responsibility to do that. To me, it’s not a choice do I work in antiracism work or not. As a Black person, I’m always having to deal with racism. I can choose to do it by ignoring it. I can choose to do it by actually taking part in some antiracist project that I think might actually make a difference either for the community, or for the sort of education of white people which I think is something we should do—because we have the expertise to do that.
6.3.3 Conclusion

This section has discussed the ways that the whiteness of abstract liberal ideology invades racial equity work to defend the racial status quo that this work ought to be challenging. Among these ways is some white racial equity workers’ failure to make unpopular calls against racism, particularly where they feel it will result in white backlash against them. This might be considered a purposeful act of omission. The Black racial equity workers feel, “What use is a white ally in racial equity work if s/he fails to stand against racism at these key moments?”

Another way that whiteness’s abstract liberal ideology manifests itself within racial equity work is where the strategies for approaching the work actually stall it rather than move it forward. Where white racial equity workers fail to challenge this, it might be considered a passive act of omission. The climate of abstract liberalism prevails in Euro-North American societies and is one of the key racial ideologies that define these societies. Consequently, racial equity workers must be able to recognize it as a fundamental object against which their racial equity work must be aimed. Again, what use is a racial equity project if it fails to strike at the very fundamental ideology of the racism it claims to challenge? And what use is a racial equity colleague who cannot even recognize her/his participation in it?

In both of these cases, racial inequity is allowed to persist through what amounts to the active or passive defense of whiteness and racism. The Black participants find some white racial equity workers particularly prone to these omissions, and particularly unwilling to bring their social power, much of which comes through whiteness, to bear against other Whites in the interest of advancing racial equity. Where power and
authority are not used to bring about outcomes which we all claim to agree are in the best interest of the society, the veracity of our consensus on racial equity is called into question. One might legitimately ask whether racial inequity is not actually compounded in these crucial moments through these sites and these individuals. When the individuals and organizations charged (at least nominally) with ensuring racial equity actually fail to do so over time or in those moments when a clear affront has been made to the claim of racial equity, it is certainly not absurd to assume that whiteness becomes emboldened and that those who genuinely seek racial equity will become more frustrated and disenchanted. Once again, where there isn’t vigilance, the likelihood exists that the white body in racial equity work may bring with it these contradictory effects. Surely, the alleged advantages of using white power and privilege for advancing racial equity causes are in question if, ultimately, whiteness will not be called into action against itself.

6.4 Shifting the Focus: Motives & Structurally-Determined White Privilege in Racial Equity Work

According to the Black racial equity workers interviewed for this study, there is a risk that Whites who are involved in racial equity work are involved more for the personal benefits (such as recognition, credentials and accolades) that they can reap from doing the work than for what they can contribute to furthering the racial equity cause. According to the participants, where Whites are involved in racial equity work for their personal benefit, occupying a particular position or role in racial equity work is an end in itself and there is no true commitment to racial equity. In some cases, this orientation may be counterproductive and the white racial equity worker benefits from the work at
the expense of the racial equity cause. This section discusses manifestations of this phenomenon, and examines how these motives may interfere with the racial equity project and shift its outcomes away from achieving racial equity and the liberation of the racially oppressed.

6.4.1 When Whites benefit from racial equity roles

The recent trend toward the commoditization (and in many cases, consequent domestication) of equity work has set the stage for what the participants see as another frustrating phenomenon in racial equity work. Imani describes these paradoxical contemporary shifts and the way that they have impacted racial equity work:

**Imani:** Nowadays there are jobs which have equity in them, you know. Nowadays there are roles that relate to this, and people aspire to those roles. … I really resent—I have to say—the fact that race has become a business and a profession and a role. I don’t think any of us should have to have it, Black or white. And I think that there are a lot of people making a lot of money on it, usually white people, but making a lot of money on it because it’s there, and because it has become a role.

Of course, as an equity worker herself, Imani does not disagree that there is need to do racial equity work. Rather, she objects to the way that the co-opting of equity work by mainstream society produces conditions that, paradoxically, interfere with attaining the goal of racial equity. Under the present conditions, racial equity work is often no longer an endeavour in which the only rewards one might expect are the lofty ones of having advanced the racial equity goal—along with a great deal of stigma and social retribution on the personal level. While this is still often so where racial equity work truly challenges the racist status quo, there are a number of nominal racial equity positions that have the potential to yield a great deal of personal benefit depending upon how they are used. Not all such positions are held by those who are disingenuous.
However, as Diane explains, the personal benefits that can be gained may serve to create multiple motives for seeking to do this work:

**Diane:** I believe there is a category of white people who do sort of “get it” in the sense that they recognize that they are part of the oppressor group and that *everybody* in that group, *everybody* in my mind, is capable of oppressing others based on skin colour. … So, there are people who are effective, yeah. There are other people who do this work who have some sense of—, some consciousness about the fact that racism is bad, that oppression is horrible, and all of that stuff, and I call them, you know, sort of the people who are on the left, who sort of have some recognition—much like the civil rights workers in the 1960s. One of the problems there with that group is that, ah, not all, but many of the people in that group are doing this work less because of the fact that it is socially redeeming than for some personal benefit. Now that personal benefit can be in an academic climate: their work is widely read, they get promotions or conferencing, or books, or whatever kind of recognition that might come out of that. And so it’s used in that sense as some kind of professional advancement. … So to me there are two kinds of groups, or two kinds of liberals, if you like. Those who are sincere and those who have some personal interest, whether it’s job advancement, or whatever it is, for doing the kind of work that they do.

In this excerpt, Diane makes a distinction between two groups of Whites involved in racial equity work: those Whites who may be termed radical because of their well developed critical understanding of whiteness and how their bodies locate them for the exercise of white power; and those whom she terms white liberals, who get involved in racial equity work based on no more than a diffuse understanding that racial oppression is wrong. Interestingly enough, Diane only sees the white radicals as truly effective in racial equity work. Among the white liberals, however, Diane sees some Whites who are “sincere”—that is, that their motives for getting involved in the work seem to be purely for the sake of achieving racial equity—and another group of Whites who see the opportunity to simultaneously reap personal gain and advancement from doing the work. The latter group is, by implication, insincere.
As we shall see in Section 6.4.3, Diane feels that getting involved in racial equity work with an eye upon some of the personal benefits that might be gained is not necessarily wrong. However, she does object when these motives interfere with the central purpose for the work, which is, of course, advancing racial justice.

Keith also describes how influential racial equity positions may attract persons whose motives are self-serving, and who do not have the racial equity cause at heart:

**Keith:** I’ve worked with people who are in the [racial equity] arena, but whether they are an ally or not, it’s—. I don’t think they are allies. I met a couple of people in the Cultural Harmony Network, for instance. I mean, Cultural Harmony Network is a council that was there to create racial harmony in the community, and there were white folks who were on board who weren’t—, I don’t think they were really fulfilling their responsibility of trying to create that harmony, you know what I mean? Like for them, it’s, again, it’s a status thing for them to be a part of the Cultural Harmony Network, and, you know, you’re an executive member. Because the Cultural Harmony Network is a very prominent organization in the community, and being an executive member, for them it’s a big deal. But are they doing the work in promoting racial harmony? I don’t think so.

As Keith describes it, in this community-based racial equity organization some Whites sought to be executive members simply because of the prestige associated with that position rather than to work toward racial equity. We also notice that for Keith this self-serving motive disqualifies them from being white allies because they negatively affect the racial equity work. Elsewhere in his interview, he describes how this works in institutions where there is a designated racial equity position or role:

**Keith:** It’s personal elevation of self. You know, “I’m in this position. I’m gonna use it for what it’s worth. Maybe it looks good on my resume for my next job,” whatever the case may be. You know, “Maybe it gets me to meet influential people, to be in x-amount of this place and that place, you know, like rubbing shoulders with higher-ups and the big wigs of our community,” you know, all those niceties that goes along with the job. But deep down inside, you are not there to influence changes to bring about equity and equality. … And if you have authorities in positions of power to influence changes and they’re not doing it, it’s like they’re doing a disservice to the whole community and to the people that
they’re serving. But they wouldn’t leave the position because, of course, it’s a very affluent position and well paid, whatever goes along with it. They won’t leave it. But at the end of the day, not too much changes are being made. And for us as community leaders, that’s why our job becomes, you know, so tedious, because here we are dealing—. You can’t go show that person because that’s where it stops. And then if they don’t wanna push the issues forward, then it doesn’t go anywhere. It falls on deaf ears.

Keith shows that where the primary motive for getting involved in racial equity work is personal benefit, there is no progress toward racial equity and social change. Since the personal goals that such a person has are met simply by occupying the racial equity role, they cannot be relied upon to advocate for racial equity as their job title implies they ought. Blacks, either in the community or within the institution, cannot be assured that such a person will represent their concerns at these levels within the institution. As I argued in the previous section, this is often precisely what institutions posting job positions of this sort want. Keith tells us that as long as those with self-serving motives occupy these roles, they keep out those who might sincerely pursue racial equity. They therefore effectively shut down the work.

Ajani has also seen Whites self-centeredly benefiting from projects that set out to be racial equity projects. He speaks of such an experience:

**Ajani:** Well there’s one person that big time comes to mind, interestingly, and he definitely made a negative mark on a pretty wide scale. And I think it comes down to, I think in many ways, just in their heart what are their true goals and intentions. When you’re in a certain place, you know, you may see the commonalities in mutual benefit, but if the benefit suddenly shifts, where do they stand? And I think that’s probably what made them a poor ally was that, really, what their goal was was to get into the hip-hop thing on a certain level—it was actually on an organizational level. But when it came down to it, his real goals were personal advancement within a culture that is not his own. So I think that probably is where that falls short, where it’s, ah, the true intentions in the heart.

What we see again from this excerpt is that Ajani, like Keith, is concerned about Whites’ underlying motives for doing the work. He also sees those with self-centered motives as
poor allies, and relates that working with Whites under these conditions leaves a bad taste in the mouths of Blacks.

In the above excerpt, Ajani also speaks of his white colleague seeking “personal advancement within a culture that is not his own.” Ajani makes it clear in his interview that as an artist, he promotes the sharing of artistic ideas and forms. However, what he objects to here is this white individual’s insincere engagement in this particular racial equity project such that it served his interests at the expense of Blacks’. In this particular instance, the white person in question maneuvered his way into financially profiting, and disproportionately so, from the project at the expense of the Black partners in the project.

Ajani also astutely points out that in this situation, it is not simply that the racial equity project has been hindered by the motives of the self-interested white individual, but much more importantly that Whites benefit at the expense of Blacks through these arrangements. When this situation is examined through the lens of a Critical Race Africology (see Section 2.6) by asking whose agency is promoted and whose interests are served, we see that this arrangement is disqualified from being a racial equity project. The (now, only nominal) racial equity project has swung at a very fundamental level from promoting the liberation of the racially oppressed to serving the interests of Whites. Ostensible racial equity endeavours operating under these conditions will not only be unproductive, they simply are not racial equity endeavours in the first place.

As another important point, note that this phenomenon of self-interested white racial equity workers contrasts sharply with the general assumption of their selflessness and humanitarianism which was discussed in Section 5.6.2, to which the participants object.
6.4.2 Cultural appropriation: When Whites benefit from racial equity alliances

Ajani also leads us into a somewhat more nuanced discussion of the ways Whites may benefit from racial equity work. A great deal of Ajani’s racial equity work is arts-based, so among the participants he has a unique entry point into this discussion. His entry point causes him to have particular insights and emphasize particular aspects of the contradictions in racial equity collaboration between Blacks and Whites, and these insights can be applied to other types of racial equity work—particularly those that take place in the academy, as well as any form of racial equity work that primarily involves issues of representation.

In Ajani’s reference in the excerpt above to a white colleague’s seeking “personal advancement within a culture that is not his own,” Ajani hints at a theme which he fully develops later in the interview, and to which he returns often—that of cultural appropriation. This concept seems to serve as an anchor for his entire interview. He offers a tentative definition of appropriation:

**Ajani:** I wouldn’t try to claim that I have the answer as to what appropriation is, but I think it’s probably, you know, I—. OK. What I’ll say is this. In general, we [Blacks] have not been able to reap most of the fruits of our gifts and our efforts and our work. And when I say our gifts, it can come down to the tools and gifts that we have creatively; it can come down to the creative concepts that work on a business, and on a practical, and on an economic level, and it can come right down to the land that we were blessed with to come out of the richest continent with the richest history.

His definition highlights a claim that, historically, Blacks have generally not benefited as much as they ought to have from their own culture, work, and resources. He suggests that Whites have reaped or appropriated much of the benefit that should have gone to Blacks. This concept is plainly evidenced in the histories of slavery and colonization that have affected Blacks. They are also evident in the ways that Black music forms have
been taken up by dominant culture, often without the acknowledgement that is due to the Blacks who have created them. One need only think of jazz and the blues which are commonly styled, simply, “American” music, obscuring the deep roots of this music in African/African American culture and the Black experience of exclusion within mainstream American culture.

However, Ajani applies the concept of cultural appropriation to contemporary popular culture at a deeper level, demonstrating the ways that in spite of the good intentions of Whites or the oppositional ways they choose to define themselves, structural arrangements predispose Whites to benefit from their involvement with Black popular culture:

**Ajani:** A white person may say, “This is what I’m about. I believe, I know that we’re all from Africa, we’re one people,” and so forth. But when it comes to socially there’s still, for example in my area of music, you know, when an artist comes out that is white doing something that is traditionally quote-unquote Black, they get more opportunity; they’re considered, you know, the prodigal children; they get the extra push. For example, if you look at how much push someone like Eminem has gotten, or the “King,” Elvis—again, big quote-unquote—it’s not as simple as self-definition … because time and time again what we’re talking about is the biggest assault on our people is cultural appropriation, you know.

The cultural appropriation that Ajani speaks to in this excerpt and in his mention of a white colleague achieving “personal advancement within a culture that is not his own” refers to more than deliberate attempts to appropriate credit and benefit from Black creative influence. Instead, he refers to the tendency for Whites to gain evidently coveted social credentials by means of the racial border-crossings they make through engaging this popular culture. These racial border-crossings work with the meanings made available through mainstream liberal discourses to allow Whites to perform themselves as fashionable, egalitarian, and even as slightly naughty, irreverent, or rebellious—all
qualities that seem to attenuate (the relevance of) their whiteness and qualify them as sophisticated, cosmopolitan subjects (see, e.g., discussions in Hess, 2005; hooks, 1992a, pp. 21-23; Rodriquez, 2006). However, these and other scholars argue that these border-crossings entrench the understanding of whiteness as normal and irrelevant, thus masking its dominance and ensuring its continuance. In popular culture, these border-crossings may also be used to mark Whites as “authentic,” thereby legitimizing them to speak/perform “as Black” and/or to appropriate and profit from a racial experience that is not their own through downplaying the significance of race (Rodriquez, 2006). The cultural form soon becomes detached from its roots in a Black experience.

Whatever credentials of egalitarianism, sophistication, naughtiness, irreverence or rebellion there are that might be garnered from involving oneself in Black popular culture can also be garnered more directly through involvement in Black resistance struggles (which often do have a popular culture component). These involvements can therefore also serve the project of making whiteness, and particularly the whiteness of the racial equity worker, irrelevant, and the same kinds of appropriations can occur. Ajani’s concerns resonate with Diane’s where she talks about the disadvantages she sees to doing racial equity work with Whites:

**Diane:** I think a lot of us——, in fact I would probably say every Black person I know has been in a situation like that where there is, ah, an attempt to, ah——what’s the word I’m looking for?——ahm, to take ownership of our experiences or our work. And that’s always troublesome.

Diane refers here to a similar appropriation process whereby the voice, discourse, and work of Black resistance becomes uncoupled from the community/ies and the experiences within which they are generated and are used for the profit and advancement of Whites.
The structural conditions creating this dynamic are a particular concern for Ajani because in his work he is combining racial equity work with popular cultural forms. His work, therefore, combines the risks whereby Whites are seen as more competent and credible (See Section 5.6.2) with the risks that Whites will be able to appropriate his work—all of which may happen despite any good intentions of the Whites involved unless deliberate precautions are taken to avoid it.

Add to this the fact that, as we have seen, Whites working in racial equity are often assumed to be selfless (see Section 5.6.2) despite the fact that they may, indeed, occupy those roles for selfish reasons. In similar manner, the Whites involved in racial equity projects of the sort Ajani is involved in may earn a reputation as “authentic” and “egalitarian” that may well belie the stark whiteness of their motives and any self-serving reasons for their involvement.

Critical scholars have argued similarly with respect to white Critical Whiteness academics. They claim that the emergence in the academy of this niche for Whites may serve to downplay their whiteness and secure their critical credentials at the precise moment that their implication in systems of racial dominance are being pointed out (see Andersen, 2003, pp. 22-24). The participants in this study therefore object to this perverse potential for Whites, through their involvement with Blacks and engagement with their resistance struggles, to be propelled forward and receive career and other benefits within a system that already privileges them in these areas. The result seems to be that Whites are further ahead and Blacks further back through the very efforts that ought to have leveled the playing field. Once again, a Critical Race Africological
analysis would suggest that these efforts do not, in the end, qualify as racial equity efforts.

6.4.3 Blacks who use racial equity work for personal benefit

It is important to note here that the participants are well aware that there are Blacks who also use the domain of racial equity work for personal benefit. Thus, they do not claim that only Whites can enter racial equity work for selfish reasons. As with the Whites, some Blacks do this work hoping to advance themselves while they advance the racial equity cause. Imani again refers to the emergence of the racial equity industry:

Imani: So this business that generates lots of money, you know, a lot of us [Blacks] step up to the plate and say, “Well if somebody’s gonna get paid for the research, pay me,” you know, “Because I pay a mortgage like anybody else, and my kids need clothes and food and, so I may as well get into the business of race”

Some also get involved without the cause of racial equity at heart. The participants feel this personal profiteering at the expense of the racial equity work is problematic when it is done by Whites as well as when it is done by Blacks. Diane says:

Diane: But there is the recognition that there are [Black] people who do it for the same reason … to advance, ahm, not necessarily the advancement of the community, but the advancement of self. And, so, I’m not saying this is altogether something that you should never do, but I think when it has consequences in the wider community, then those people, those Black people who are doing that work are really, in my estimation, no better than the white people who are doing it.

Diane is very realistic in her realization that there will always be some individuals who will seek to gain personal benefits from doing racial equity work. She feels, however, that this is unacceptable when it happens to the detriment of the racial equity work—whether it is Whites or Blacks who jeopardize the cause. Keith feels the same way:

Keith: But some of these other [Black] leaders that are there, their concept of this kind of work is out there somewhere, right? And it’s only self-fulfilling. They
are self-fulfilling, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the broader picture … You have a responsibility, and that’s the only reason you should be around this table. You have a responsibility and you’re committed to it. I’m very committed to what I do.

Keith shares his feeling that Blacks should not be found compromising racial equity work because of the sense of responsibility they should feel as Blacks to the work and to the Black community at large. Likewise, Ajani shares that his feeling in response to Blacks undermining his racial equity work is one of betrayal:

**Philip:** Can you relate an experience that you have had working with a white ally that troubled or upset you? … This one again there may not be one, but if you had one …

**Ajani:** Well, you know, things wash over me like water …[but] I’m, like, I get more disturbed by things my people do *{laughs}*{laughs}, you know? Because, it’s almost like, with my people I feel as though we’re supposed to be moving a certain direction, and if you come and deal with something that is counter-productive—. You know, I’ve had albums not happen because of our people, not because of someone else.

For both Ajani and Keith, their disappointment with Blacks who undermine racial equity work grows out of a sense that Blacks should be in political solidarity around challenging racial inequity—that they should see it as serving a greater good to the Black community that should not be undercut by personal aggrandizement. Presumably, all Blacks should realize the importance of this work in the present and for the long-term, and should do nothing to hinder it—even for their own benefit in the short term.

Possibly growing out of that same sense, Sharon speaks about how disturbed she was by an instance in which a Black colleague and a white colleague were implicated together in undermining her for their own purposes, and at the expense of the integrity of the racial equity work that they were all doing together:

**Sharon:** You know, like, I can talk about racism, Philip, and I know how it works. But I know how we participate in it—because I’ve seen it—to our own
and different advantage, right? … The big incident that happened with her [the white woman] which was a really traumatic incident for me, involved the Black woman and the way I saw power playing out there. … I mean she was the conduit for the whole thing going down the way that it did … I mean, it all comes back to race and how people negotiate race—Black people also—and how we try to use it to our advantage. And so there are different intersecting sorts of issues at play.

Sharon is disenchanted both by the effects of this incident upon her personally and because of the betrayal of the racial equity cause that this incident, as well as the conditions that precipitated the incident, represent. She describes these conditions:

Sharon: The [Black] woman who is the head of the organization, in my observation in the time that I was there, doesn’t like to be challenged. And Black people are more likely to challenge her than a white person whose position is very shaky to begin with. So I remember when the call for a manager went out and, and applications came in. And good applications from good scholars, Black scholars, and there aren’t a lot in Canada, but I saw the ones that came in from the good scholars. And good people who’ve done work in the area, and in the end she convinced the board to go with this white woman on the basis that she came with a lot more practical experiences than other people who had applied. And of course, the chair of the board said, “Well I’m not comfortable with this. I mean just in terms of optics, it looks bad that we have—. It’s a small organization. We don’t have very many opportunities in this city for those kinds of positions for Black people. And there’re lots of Black people out there who could do this job.” So the agreement was that they would hire her with the understanding that she couldn’t represent the face of the organization. She would have to work in the background and other people who were Black would represent the face of the organization. So, you can see that there were some real problems there. And she certainly wasn’t hired because she had good critical race skills which I thought, again, was very strange for a position of that high profile. I mean the organization has done work at a very high level to challenge racial injustice. How do you do that as a manager when you don’t have a race perspective? So that was a huge issue. … I’m not saying she was a bad manager, but she wasn’t able to do the work at the level that she was expected to do the work. She did have some good skills, but not skills that were good enough to be in a position like that.

In Sharon’s recounting of the events, a Black woman used her leadership position to make self-serving decisions that compromised the racial equity cause, its credibility, and its effectiveness in order to secure her own ambitions. Clearly, the hiring of a racial equity worker who has no critical race skills could not benefit the racial equity work.
I by no means want to make small of the drastically injurious effects, on spiritual, emotional, and practical levels, of Blacks who sabotage racial equity work. And I am well aware of the ways that these moves are capitalized upon by Whites who seek to oppose and undermine racial equity causes. However, the point that I feel needs to be made here is that whether it is a white racial equity worker or a Black one who undermines the racial equity work, it is Blacks collectively who pay the price, and this ultimately affects any Black individual who might be doing the undermining. Thus, while it is fair to say that white and Black equity workers who are self-seeking do equal damage to the racial equity project, it is difficult to make the claim that they benefit in the same ways and to the same degree. Further, the structures that are in place that benefit Whites simply for getting involved in racial equity work, whatever their motives, do not similarly accrue to Blacks. So, the extents to which they can benefit are already preset to favour Whites and disfavour Blacks. Finally, once the credentials of authority, selflessness, authenticity and open-mindedness are inscribed upon Whites, they reinforce ideas of white superiority. Even if Blacks could reap these credentials through racial equity work, the result would be the challenging rather than the validation of white supremacist understandings.

6.4.4 Conclusion

This section has sought to establish that there are a number of complications that arise in racial equity work when Whites engage in it for their own benefit—especially when this benefit undermines the racial equity cause. Where Whites occupy racial equity roles for the sake of status or financial remuneration, their occupying of the roles becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Ostensible racial equity functions
of the role will often not be met, or the worker’s whiteness may cause her/him to manifest any of the dynamics mentioned in previous sections.

Whites may also benefit from being a part of racial equity alliances because of the racist discourses and meanings that surround such engagement. Whether their motives are originally selfish or not, they benefit from the credentializing that happens through these alliances, and are perfectly positioned to appropriate the racial equity work and/or to gain ascendancy in the domain of racial equity work. This may happen at the expense of their Black colleagues and at the expense of Black agency and interests. Again this outcome is an inappropriate one for racial equity work. The participants assert, and I agree, that what must be avoided at all costs is the paradoxical situation whereby Blacks might become subordinate within struggles for their own liberation against the marginalization that they know best!

6.5 Of White Leaders, Champions, Ambassadors and Spokespersons

One question in the interview schedule asked about the participants’ feelings concerning white leadership within racial equity endeavours. The participants spoke of a number of manifestations of white leadership in racial equity work including those Whites given authority over Nonwhites in racial equity departments or organizations, those positioned as spokespersons or ambassadors for people of Colour, and those designated as champions of racial equity in corporations or government departments. While there was a range of opinions among the participants, it is also evident that many of the issues discussed in the foregoing sections of this chapter seem to converge and become intensified in this discussion.
To begin with, we note the general climate in which whiteness is positioned as competent with respect to Blackness, which is seen as incompetent. For example, Beverly relates:

**Beverly**: I find that in many instances where a white person comes in, that there is the—, there is that possibility of that white person stepping ahead, overshadowing the Black person. And it’s very, it’s very evident. Like, even in the school system, I’m telling you that where I have three, and in one case four white vice-principals, and I was a Black principal, you have people who come in and would think that one of my vice-principals is the principal.

In this instance, which is not necessarily happening within the context of racial equity work, it seems that the white person is presuming that s/he can do a better job of leading than the Black person who is already in place as leader. Further, those coming into the situation unaware of the relationships within it also presume that the white person is the leader rather than the Black person. Therefore, against this backdrop, wherever the white racial equity worker is not self-critical about how s/he is structurally positioned with respect to her/his Black colleagues aside and apart from any competencies they may or may not have, there will always already be the potential for unequal relations within the collaboration. Diane tells us what this might be like when it begins to make itself manifest. When asked about the disadvantages of Black-white collaborations for racial equity work, she says:

**Diane**: The disadvantages I’ve already talked about are in terms of the sort of take-over mentality.

This dynamic is evidence of the unequal terms of relationship and the ways that racial inequity and a supremacist white identity can be created through the avenue of racial equity work. There is certainly the sense of the “white [wo/]man’s burden” (Kipling, 1899) of having to step in and do for Blacks who are supposedly incapable of doing for
themselves, setting up the “missionary” dynamic that Imani speaks about in Section 6.2.1. It is important to note that in neither excerpt above is the white person in an actual position of leadership. The excerpts only draw a vivid picture of the climate that might surround such leadership—that is, that there seems to be a tendency toward Whites assuming leadership, apparently on that basis of an assumption that Blacks are not effective leaders.

It is no surprise, then, that when she is asked her feelings about white leaders in racial equity endeavours, Beverly quickly inserts cautions into her otherwise neutral response. She says:

**Beverly**: I really don’t have a difficulty with it. The only time I have difficulty with it is—. Part of the difficulty with racism is that within the white culture people have a certain amount of power, and exercising that power sometimes negatively over others is what creates racism. And if a person within that organization who is a white person still comes into that organization and uses that power in the role of leadership in a negative way, then I have difficulty with it. … That’s the only way I have difficulty with the leadership, if it is used as a power, in a suppressive way. That’s where I have difficulty.

Beverly is cautious about the way that racism could potentially be reinscribed when a white person is placed in leadership in a racial equity endeavour.

Other participants’ cautions about white leadership in racial equity situations revolve around whether the white racial equity worker has the requisite levels of knowledge and understanding about the work to assume a position of leadership in it. For example, Maryam says:

**Maryam**: Well me, if I was the head of an organization, I would never give the antiracism work to a white person. … When it comes to equity, in a lot of departments in the public service, you can see that it’s done by white people, people who have never worked in antiracism organizations. … Yeah, you see people working on equity things and on work relationship, and its amazing to see that they have no clue about what they are talking! No expertise, no understanding, no background!
James concurs, saying:

James: And I think at my level, at my age now I don’t particularly want to come into a racial equity program being subservient to some white guy, and that’s where I’m coming from. It’s arrogance {laughs} on my part … but, more importantly, because I believe strongly that they don’t know what they’re doing, and they are wrong, and they are not being effective.

Against the backdrop of the discussion in Chapter 4, it is reasonable to surmise that the participants’ concerns are not about their colleagues needing to have some specific information that would qualify them for leadership in racial equity work, but rather, that their concerns are rooted in their understanding of the place of Black (or nonwhite) embodied knowledge in racial equity work—knowledge to which Whites do not have access. This conclusion seems to be borne out where Keith says:

Keith: I don’t think white folks should be the one to champion our cause. I don’t think so. I can see them in a supportive role, but not in a leadership role to champion Black people’s cause. And for the simple reason is that they don’t feel what we feel!

It is also borne out in the following excerpt from Quentin’s interview:

Terrence: You know I have to tell you honestly, I’m not exposed at all to the issue of white leadership in antiracism organizations. When I was in Major Canadian City 1, I was the president of [omitted for confidentiality], and when I was replaced it was by a South Asian, and then from the South Asian we had someone who was Jewish, but I was no longer attuned with what was going on. And since I’ve been in Major Canadian City 3, the few organization that I have befriended, they have been headed by visible minorities. So I have not one opinion around Whites leading antiracism organizations.

Philip: OK. Would you want to maybe comment on the fact that there, so far in your circles, have been none? Is that just happenstance or is that—?

Terrence: Yeah. I think so. I think I would have found it. I don’t know how many examples you have of that, but I think it goes back to my earlier comment that I made to you. I would find it strange for white leadership leading an antiracism organization. I would find it really strange. Yeah, it’s like you saying that the head of Catalyst is a man. There is a disconnect. So, I’m not too sure
how we come to that, and I am not too sure why. I guess you must have examples of that, or else you would not be asking the question.

In this excerpt, Terrence again invokes the comparison between gender equity work and racial equity work. He thinks it would be equally inappropriate for a man to be the head of a gender equity organization as it would be for a white person to be the head of a racial equity organization. He identifies the problem with these arrangements as involving a “disconnect,” or a lack of embodied connection to the work. Quentin seems to feel the same way:

**Quentin:** Well, you have to show me some situation where it’s worked, because I haven’t seen it yet. I haven’t seen it work in any of the situations that I’ve been familiar with here in Canadian Province 2. There might be some place where it works, but I certainly haven’t witnessed it. We’ve had situations here in Canadian Province 2 where there’s been white leadership in Black organizations—Black organizations-slash-agencies, departments, whatever the case may be—and to me they have not worked.

**Philip:** Why not?

**Quentin:** I think it comes back, I think, to something I said earlier about people without the education are appointed to these positions, and when I say the education I’m not talking about the academic education, I’m talking about the education of what it’s like to be African, of African descent. So we have to realize that—. One of the things I’ve asked of the person responsible for this position: “Well what have they done in the way of preparing yourself for this position?” So when I ask you questions about Denmark Vesey, ‘What’s relevant about the year 1832-1833?’ ‘When was the first race riot in Canada?’ well you know what? You should know those. So whether it be Nat Turner or Denmark Vesey, or Harriet Tubman or whoever, you should have some sort of a knowledge of who these individuals are or were, and what was some of the stuff that they did, but you tell me they mean nothing to you; those dates don’t mean anything, Birchtown means nothing to you; then that tells me you haven’t done anything to prepare yourself for this position. You’re flying by the seat of your pants, and you know what? That’s not good enough!”

Early in this excerpt, Quentin points out that it is not scholastic knowledge that he seeks in a white colleague who would lead in racial equity work. He is, instead, speaking more about an embodied connection to the work—what he describes as “the education of what
it’s like to be African, of African descent.” The Black History quiz that Quentin then tells us he posed to his white colleague to check his level of preparation for leadership in the work is best understood as an appeal for some evidence that he understands the importance of an embodied connection to the work and his inability to acquire the embodied knowledge that a Black person would have. His ability to answer these questions might therefore have been evidence of some effort to at least acquire as much of the kind of knowledge that he can attain. Quentin is convinced that this man has no right to lead in racial equity work when he is unable to demonstrate an understanding of the way his white body positions him to know (or not know) about the work or his need to seek out the kind of knowledge that would challenge mainstream constructions of race and racism. I take up this notion of the need to challenge Whites’ supposed neutral embodied relationship to racial equity work in Chapter 7.

An excerpt from Diane’s interview sums up this notion that leaders in racial equity work needing to have an embodied connection to the work that they do. She says:

**Diane:** Well, I do talk about the leadership of white people in programs or in institutions that are quote-unquote affirmative action, or diversity, or whatever of those phrases you wanna use. And my position then, and my position now, is that those programs ought to be run by members of the oppressed group—whatever oppressed group that is. So, example, I wouldn’t put a man in a women’s studies program {laughs} any more than I would put a white person in an affirmative action program for Black people. … I’ve seen in many situations now and in the last, probably, decade or so in educational institutions, for example, where white women are being put at the head of affirmative action programs for Aboriginal people, for Black people, for other racialized groups. I’ve seen heterosexual women be put in positions where they are directors of programs for lesbians, you know. So, I guess what I’m saying is that when we’re talking about the oppression of white women it is different from the oppression of racialized people and I don’t think—and I, in fact, I’ve said that white women don’t have the authority to speak for me because of that.

**Philip:** So then not to lead in the struggle either.
Diane: I don’t think they can lead in it. They can be a part of it.

Philip: They can be a part of it but not lead—?

Diane: Don’t lead me! I don’t need leading. {Both laugh}

This excerpt summarizes what has been said by the other participants, but it also adds a dimension. It returns us to Beverly’s observations, raising concerns about the problematic power relationships that are set up in situations where Whites have leadership in racial equity work. James points to this and how it is related to the issue of the lack of embodied knowledge. Picking up at the end of his excerpt above, he says:

James: … I believe strongly that they don’t know what they’re doing, and they are wrong, and they are not being effective. So it’s very difficult to work in that sort of environment where you have to report to the person, and you have to be very careful, without jeopardizing your job, so—.

Here James speaks about the practical concerns and power contradictions involved with having to report to someone whose dominant (embodied) knowledge of the work is uninterrogated and may contradict his own knowledge that, like Diane, he deems to be better suited to the work. This arrangement might require that the Black racial equity worker challenge the knowledge of the white leader, and therefore either places the Black racial equity worker at risk, or silences her/him. This would, of course, depend to some extent upon the leadership style of the white person, but will always be problematic where the Black subordinate is constantly in the place of having to challenge, or at least raise questions about, the knowledge and decisions of her/his white supervisor.

When Sharon is posed the question about white leadership in racial equity work, she has the same concerns about the power implications, and her response is visceral:

Philip: What are your feelings about white leadership in organizations that have a mandate around fighting racism?
Sharon: \{Sucks in her breath\} I think it’s wrong! I think it’s morally wrong! \{Philip laughs\} It’s immoral! It’s illegal! If I could make a citizen’s arrest I would! That defeats the purpose. It does defeat the purpose when you get in—. I mean, you know, just yesterday I was having a discussion with my students about why I have a problem with [omitted for confidentiality] being the leader of [omitted for confidentiality] and how conflicted I feel about that. Because on the one hand, I think it’s such an important issue and it needs to be—you need to think about it and you need to—. But how is it that you’ve got millions of people [in that situation] everyday, and you’ve got one person who is white representing the issue on behalf of Blacks? I have a problem with that. Ahm, I would have a really hard time unless it was an extraordinarily, exceptionally amazing white person, and I don’t know that that exists. Working with somebody in a leadership position in an organization that set out to fight racism, I don’t know how that would work. It’s wrong! Where is your analysis of issues of power? Right there that tells me something.

Sharon is taking James’s question about how power and knowledge are related in situations where Whites lead in racial equity work a step further. In Section 6.2.1, I discussed the participants’ rejection of the missionary approach which inferiorizes and infantilizes Blacks. The clear implication is that Whites should enter racial equity work with some understanding of the potential for these colonial power relationships to be set up by the work, and with a willingness to act to make sure that they are not. For Sharon, the simple fact that a white person accepts a leadership role in racial equity work, when there are so many Nonwhites who might be qualified to do so, suggests to her that the white person is not sufficiently aware of, or concerned about, the missionary colonial dynamic. The essence of racial equity work is to challenge inequitable relations of race, and the white worker should be seeking ways to invert these colonial dynamics rather than reinforce them. Taking a leadership position over people of Colour in racial equity work does not seem to support this process.

Sharon is also concerned about the matter of voice when Whites are positioned to speak for the racially oppressed or their causes. She says:
Sharon: This is where I say I’m conflicted because I respect him. … I think his heart is in the right place on one level. But in a world where social inequality exists, there is a reason why he is able to occupy that space and that’s my issue. That’s the first thing. The second thing is, I know a lot of people, not necessarily personally, but there have to be lots of African people who are doing work on the issues—doing good work on those issues. If there was an equality in those voices and the representation across the board, I probably wouldn’t struggle as much as I do. But there isn’t, and that’s part of why I struggle. So it’s a problem for me; it’s a problem because it is embedded in inequality and the fact that people don’t have access to resources, and the fact that not a lot of African people can … be bigged up in the international community the way that he is able to. I mean I’ve listened to him and he talked about, you know, the wonderful [Black] people that he’s met [doing this work] … And it made me feel like sh*t to say “Well, this is wrong!” {Both laugh}, you know … But I kept thinking, “Well it would have been nice to hear from the African women,”—that it would have been nice for them to occupy that space and talk about their own lives and ask for the things that they need and to articulate their own reality and things like that. And there isn’t an equality in doing that, and that’s what triggers my response.

In this excerpt, Sharon takes us back to the discussion in Chapter 5 and at the beginning of this chapter, showing how it is magnified where Whites are in positions of leadership. Where Whites are positioned as spokespersons and/or leaders because they will gain the attention of a larger (white) audience and mobilize resources on this basis, the voices of those with actual first-hand of racial oppression are diminished and their agency curtailed. This is not a straightforward situation for Sharon, and her personal dissonance about it is evident. She wants Whites to be involved in racial equity work and understands the advantages of having high profile Whites lend their weight to these causes. However, she understands how these situations have the potential to reinscribe inequity.

Terrence speaks about a similar situation to the one Sharon raises here. However, he does not understand this spokesperson situation as an example of white leadership in racial equity work. He says:
Terrence: “I don’t look at [this] as leading an antiracism organization. I look at [this] as a white man using his position of power to actually make a change.”

Thus, despite his reservations about white leaders in racial equity work, for Terrence this does not qualify, and he supports this kind of intervention. He seems to resolve the conflict that Sharon feels by defining this as a special instance—something other than leadership. He says:

Terrence: I think these are the very people I was saying to you. The twenty percent that we need to help us. This is the white male that I was talking about that we need. So there’s nothing for me to say wrong about him.”

A fuller discussion of Terrence’s notion of leveraging Whites and white power and its possible consequences is taken up in Chapter 8.

Imani is not as resistant as some of the other participants to the idea of white leaders in racial equity work. She says:

Imani: Well I’d have to assess the leaders and the leader. And I would have to find out how capable they were at understanding and then interpreting to those people who needed that interpretation—those in power and everyone else—to bring about equity. Some people are very good at it.

Philip: Is there a race effect at all or, or is it really up to the individual?

Imani: Well hey, it’s what I said before. I mean, some people can empathize, can understand, can know, make it their business to know, are sensitive, are well tuned, seem to understand and take the time to know what the signs are, what the signals are, what the pinch is, what pinches the nerve, they, they understand it, and it’s almost—. I wouldn’t say it’s intuitive. I guess it seems intuitive because of the way they understand, but I guess they’ve taken time or the trouble, or they’re sensitive to issues, and they understand, they don’t deny, or they’ve have had vast experiences. … I wouldn’t want to remove or erase the whole issue that there are many Caucasians, many Whites, as well as others, who have this ability.

Despite her reluctance to completely reject the idea of white leadership in racial equity work, in this excerpt Imani does set very high standards for such a leader. S/he must recognize and understand the subtle manifestations of racism rather than participate in the
discourses of denial that are typical of mainstream understandings of race. Imani also assert that this is not an innate ability, but is one that the white racial equity worker arrives at through exposure and by seeking out this knowledge. This might be a part of the kind of effort that Quentin seeks in Whites who would lead in racial equity work. It does not replace Blacks’ embodied knowledge, but does represent some awareness of the contingencies of the white body in racial equity work.

However, Imani is very concerned about the issue of voice and how the agency of the racially oppressed might be usurped. Later in the interview, Imani tells us about this as she speaks of her own approach to racial equity work and the ways in which she avoids usurping voice and denying Black agency. She seeks ways to come alongside those on whose behalf she is advocating while insisting that they assume responsibility and leadership in responding to racial injustice. In this manner, she recognizes and promotes the agency of those for whom she advocates, and inverts the potential inequitable power dynamics:

Imani: So I would say to them [white equity workers], “Be sensitive. Don’t think you know it all even though you know a great deal. Let other people speak for themselves, where they can and when they can.” I try very hard not to speak for people. I don’t even go to schools for people. I say to them, “I’ll go with you. I will not go for you. I’m not gonna take your power. You’re gonna be there.” You know, one time I’ll be your mouthpiece, the next time I’ll be your puppet. But I’m not gonna take away your power.

Imani recognizes her own susceptibility to undermining the agency of her clients, and works against this by paying attention to the way she is located differently in the social landscape than they—despite what she may have in common with them. She therefore expects that her white colleagues, whose racial location differs from that of the
clients and makes them more susceptible to re-inscribing an inequitable power dynamic, will take at least as much care not to slip into this dynamic:

**Imani:** Because, you know, its one thing for me to say, “Oh well, I understand what it is to be Black.” I do! But I don’t understand what it is to be an immigrant who has had some great professional job and then arrived here and is living in government housing, and people are looking at them every day, you know. ... Same thing with these people [white racial equity workers]. ... So it’s very hard even for anyone, a Black person saying, “I know exactly how you feel.” No I don’t! I’m Black and you’re Black, and I know that it hurts, but you also have that special individuality that makes you feel a certain way. You also have your set of experiences that—. So I try not to take that away. ... once you’ve taken the trouble and the time to become sensitive to other people, you have the tendency to put it all in a nice little neat box and say, “I understand exactly,” and I say, “Uh uh! You don’t. You don’t. There’s always that little bit. And even if you can explain it, let them explain it.” Talking for people is something we almost do automatically. I get very nervous about it, ’cause I’m inclined to do it too. Everybody is, you know.

Imani is clear about the dangers of not respecting difference and therefore slipping into speaking for others. Her focus in racial equity work is facilitating others to speak for themselves. It is possibly this understanding of racial equity work and what leadership in racial equity work should look like that accounts for the difference between her response and that of other participants to the notion of white leadership in racial equity work. If the position of leadership is, as Imani describes it, less a role of authority or patronage and more a role of facilitation and supporting the agency of the client, there is much less chance that the inequitable missionary dynamic to which she is so opposed will arise. The white leader will recognize the responsibility to lean upon the knowledge of the racially oppressed.

### 6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked at the contradictions that arise when Whites are involved as Whites, or on the basis of their white power and privilege, in racial equity work.
Whites involved in this work may work within abstract liberalist frames that cause them to ultimately support the racist status quo. Further, the racist structures and discourses that are in place and within/against which racial equity work is done may set up and reinforce inequitable colonial relationships, and/or facilitate Whites who do this racial equity work in the garnering of credentials, commendation and other benefits through the work. At the same time, these same structures work against Black racial equity workers who struggle for authority, credibility, and legitimacy because of these structures. This makes the endeavour contradictory and counter-productive for these Blacks.

Finally, many of the concerns expressed in this and earlier chapters regarding the white body in racial equity work are intensified in arrangements where Whites are positioned as leaders, champions, ambassadors, and spokespersons. Under these circumstances the risk of undermining the importance of Blacks embodied knowledge, the appropriation of voice, is increased. Dei’s (Dei, 2008a) notes:

We need to understand racism as a structural problem, one that while implicating everyone specifically calls on the dominant to shoulder the responsibility of power sharing. (p. 21)

Certainly, this is an important consideration in the context of a discussion about white leadership in racial equity work. The question needs to be asked whether this power sharing can be accomplished at the same time that Whites claim these positions of power and authority within the equity struggles of the racially oppressed.

Nakayama and Krizek (1999) concisely express the dynamic that creates the problematic described in this chapter. They write:

Whether or not one discursively positions oneself as “white,” there is little room for maneuvering out of the power relations embedded in whiteness. Whiteness, stated or unstated, in any of its various forms, leaves one invoking the historically constituted and systematically exercised power relations. This creates an
enormous problem for those in the center who do not want to reinforce the hegemonic position of the center and for those elsewhere who would challenge this assemblage and its influence on their lives. (p. 102)

They point out that the structurally imposed meaning of the white body and the historical relations that converge to produce the current historical moment thoroughly complicate racial relationships. I have argued that these dynamics enter into the spaces of racial equity work creating vexing contradictions regardless of how well intentioned white bodies may be or how strategic the alliance may seem to be. These must be overcome so that racial equity work can continue. These observations suggest that there should be a well theorized politics and terms of engagement within these spaces that can at least attenuate this inequitable dynamic. These will be the subject of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 7

THE POLITICS OF RACIAL EQUITY COLLABORATION:
EPistemological and Ethical/Moral Terms for Doing Racial Equity Work Across Lines of Racial Privilege

7.1 Introduction

The foregoing chapter has outlined the pitfalls, risks, and perils that the Black racial equity workers who were respondents in this study understood as either inherent to, or likely to arise when, doing racial equity work in collaboration across lines of racial privilege. In light of these, the participants’ own narratives complicate any simplistic understanding of their own claims (discussed in Chapter 5) that whiteness opens doors for racial equity work.

Clearly, the privileging of whiteness in racial equity work, even for the potential benefit of this work, is fraught with contradictions that might undermine the work that is being done. As Chapter 6 has argued, the involvement of whiteness in racial equity work is a double-edged sword capable of cutting both ways—to advantage or disadvantage, or else to advantage and disadvantage at the same time. Indeed, if we recognize whiteness (that is, white supremacy and power, not white individuals) as the focus of the challenge in racial equity work and as the barrier to Black liberation, and if we are to hold to the notion that the white body does not easily or ever completely divest of this whiteness in the present ideological climate, then involving whiteness in racial equity work is, so to speak, a form of “sleeping with the enemy,” and involving white bodies in racial equity work will demand a very particular politics that will forestall the reproduction of whiteness within the very work that intends to oppose it.
This does not suggest that racial equity coalitions between Blacks and Whites should not exist, and it would certainly be futile (and absurd) to make such a claim. These kinds of racial equity coalitions will continue to exist as both Blacks and Whites act upon their objection to racial inequity, and as they continue to gauge the possible advantages of doing this work in collaboration with differently raced bodies; but also largely because the burgeoning racial equity industry and the commoditization of racial equity work will continue to throw differently raced bodies together for the contradictory ends discussed in Section 6.4.1.

However, the existence of the contradictions generated by these collaborations suggests that there are terms within which racial equity workers can or ought to negotiate their work and working relationships in order to minimize the tendency to reinforce white supremacy. Analysis of the interview data yielded several categories that seem to communicate these terms that the participants prefer for their collaboration work with white racial equity workers. Black racial equity workers will seek out these conditions as the ideal climate within which to work in collaboration with Whites in racial equity work. It also seems from the data that in those instances where Black racial equity workers are not able to set the terms of their collaboration with Whites in racial equity work, or to freely decide whether to enter into or withdraw from these collaborations (either because of the conditions of their employment or other constraints), the terms outlined in this chapter serve, instead, as the grounds for assessing how productive these involuntary collaborations might be, and for deciding when and where they may need to engage in strategies to resist and circumvent the obstacles presented where their terms and conditions are not met.
I reiterate here that the terms presented in this chapter are intended to communicate, from the participants’ perspectives, the ideal ways of ascertaining that normalized whiteness does not poison Black-white collaborative relationships in racial equity work. These terms for collaboration fall roughly into two inter-related categories: epistemological terms, and ethical/moral terms. In many ways, they articulate the epistemologies and axiologies that these Blacks bring to racial equity work, and with which they feel their white colleagues should be in agreement. However, given the different embodied knowledges that Blacks and Whites bring to the work (discussed for Blacks in Chapter 3 and discussed more fully for Whites in this chapter), and the fact that this study presents the perspectives of Black racial equity workers, most of these terms are presented as means by which these Blacks feel their white colleagues might overcome their embodied connections to whiteness and bring their politics into alignment with that of their Black colleagues. The terms here are not intended to read as a checklist of conditions for the white racial equity to meet, or as the Black racial equity workers’ line in the sand—though admittedly, in some excerpts they may read that way. Rather, they are presented as what the study participants have found to work best in their experience and are presented in the context of this study to contribute to the academic conversation about white racial equity work and racial equity collaborations. The participants do have terms for themselves and advice for other Blacks working in racial equity collaborations with Whites. These will be taken up in Chapter 8.
7.2 Epistemological Terms of Collaboration

7.2.1 Whiteness and Epistemologies of Ignorance

As we have seen in Chapter 4, the participants in this study emphasize the salience of their embodied epistemologies. We have also seen how the importance of this embodied knowing is potentially undermined where there is the paradoxical attempt to use the privilege and power of the white body to achieve racial equity. This section takes the conversation further by submitting epistemological terms of engagement that undermine whiteness in racial equity work.

This study is undertaken within Afrocentric and Critical Whiteness frameworks, one of the major tenets of which is the invisibility (to Whites) and normalization of whiteness. Such an approach insists that issues and phenomena attending Blacks in a racist society always have a white or Eurocentric counterpart that may not be recognized or receive attention because it is not explicitly named as such. Rather, they are taken to be generic, and generalized to all humans as the “normal” standard against which all others are measured (Asante, 2003, p. 43). These approaches tend to, at best, exoticize, and at worst pathologize, those who do not meet those ostensibly generic human standards. Afrocentric and Critical Whiteness work seeks to expose and challenge these standards of normalcy.

Within this framework, then, if the study participants identify Black embodied knowing as a salient issue in racial equity work, we cannot assume that it is only Blacks that, in some exotic fashion, embody knowledge. There must also be a white counterpart to this knowledge. What might such a white embodied knowledge look like?
While not denying the possibility of its existence, the participants in this study did not directly address the possibility that Whites might have their own brand of embodied knowledge related to race, or what this knowledge might look like. Nevertheless, in the context of the discussion about white leadership in racial equity work (Section 6.5), and therefore about how knowledge is related to power and authority in racial equity work, Sharon, Quentin, and James hint at the fact that Whites’ bodies position them in particular ways with respect to the work. Heretofore I have not devoted very much space to this concept. However, in order to segue into the participants’ discussion of what, or more precisely how, they want their white colleagues to know (which would clearly implicate the type of knowledge the participants find Whites to bring to their racial equity work in the first place), it is necessary to insert here a discussion of white epistemologies of race from the theoretical literature—epistemologies that are also embodied.

Mills, in his 1997 critique of the social contract in “Western” thought, argued the inadequacy of any notion of a social contract, at least in “Western” society, that does not include a consideration of race and racism. As he discusses what he terms the “Racial Contract,” Mills introduces the notion of the epistemology of ignorance—the tendency for Whites in racist society to be ignorant of, or to misunderstand, the fundamental racial terms that construct their location on the social/racial landscape. Mills writes:

\[ \ldots \text{in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that Whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.} \quad (1997, \text{p. 18}) \]

This phenomenon is not to be understood as a primarily psychological phenomenon existing at the level of the individual, but is, rather, to be understood as a structural phenomenon (Alcoff, 2007, p. 47; Mills, 2007, p. 23) accruing to white bodies.
based on the particular interests of whiteness (not necessarily individual Whites) in mystifying, normalizing, and justifying racial inequity. The socialization of the white individual into whiteness—which crucially involves the passing on of national mythologies, white cultural memory, and the misrepresented histories of the “West” which have been sanitized of the atrocities committed against nonwhite bodies (Outlaw, 2007, p. 197)—creates particular ways of knowing, or rather, not knowing, that allow the continuance of white supremacy without white guilt. “Signatories” to the Racial Contract—that is, those who actively or passively accept the privilege afforded by the terms of the Racial Contract—must tacitly agree to the epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997, pp. 18 & 94).

The epistemology of ignorance generates a white embodied knowledge, which can be compared and contrasted with the Black embodied knowledge discussed in Section 4.9.2? Like Black embodied knowledge, this embodied knowledge is also non-propositional or implicit (see Shotwell, 2006, pp. 3-4). The Black embodied knowledge that the research participants speak of is an outgrowth of the racial epidermal schema which, in turn, arises from the interaction between the historico-racial schema and the presentation of the Black body (see Fanon, 1963, p. 112; Mahendran, 2007, p. 192); it is liberatory in nature. White embodied knowledge results from the epistemology of ignorance, which is an interaction between the historico-racial schema and the white body. It therefore may be understood as a white racial epidermal schema. It is that which is invoked upon the surface of the white body as a result of the cumulative meanings of a long history of racist discourse. However, it tends toward the upholding of an inequitable racial status quo. In contrast to the Black liberatory non-propositional
knowledge come at through the resolution of the contradiction between the Black body’s experience and the terms of a white supremacist society, this epistemology of ignorance is the background implicit, non-propositional knowledge of the white body come at through its embodiment of the privilege afforded it by a white supremacist society.

What is important about Mills’s notion of an epistemology of ignorance is that it does not construe the ignorance generated by the epistemology of ignorance as a lack or void, but rather as a particular social production and way of knowing. It is the product of a structurally and institutionally cultivated way of seeing and understanding the social world that is constituted by and for inequitable power relations. Accordingly, Alcoff describes this ignorance “not as a feature of neglectful epistemic practice but as a substantive epistemic practice in itself” (Alcoff, 2007, p. 39, emphasis in original).

Thus, to summarize, Mills’s notion of the epistemology of ignorance suggests:

1) that white bodies are structurally positioned within white supremacist societies (Alcoff, 2007, p. 47; Mills, 2007, p. 23) to “misunderstand” the racial terms that privilege them (Mills, 1997, p. 18)

2) that these “misunderstandings” foster in Whites a “dysconsciousness” (King, 1991) that serves to uphold the inequitable terms of racially inequitable societies and entrench white racial privilege. This functions primarily by normalizing/naturalizing racial inequity and, consequently, minimizing white guilt (Mills, 1997, p. 19, 95).

3) For white subjects, these misunderstandings are, themselves, a way of knowing the world and one’s place in it, and therefore do not represent a
simple lack of knowledge in the traditional sense of the word ignorance (Alcoff, 2007, p. 39; Mills, 2007, p. 26).

Mills’s concept of an epistemology of ignorance has been criticized as invoking an objective reality against which white and nonwhite epistemologies are being evaluated on the basis of how closely they approximate it (see, e.g. Cormier, 2007). For example, Cormier (2007, p. 63) is concerned with the problem such an epistemology would present for being able to determine whether and to what extent individual Blacks, as racially oppressed, have themselves escaped the effects of the mystifying forces that create this ignorance. Cormier proposes, in its place, a pragmatist philosophy whereby knowledge is not evaluated based on its ability to represent reality or truth, but rather upon its effectiveness in advancing particular political ends (pp. 73-74).

It has become axiomatic in critical circles that it is important to pay attention to the political context in which particular knowledges are generated, and that knowledge producers ought to declare their social and political locations. It is also important to pay attention to the ways in which particular discourses of resistance might inadvertently assert new regimes of dominance and hierarchies of knowledge. Thus, to this end Cormier’s cautions are appropriate. However, I suggest that the value of Mills’s ideas might best be realized if we pay close attention to exactly what types of not-knowing his epistemology of ignorance seeks to address. Mills refers, in particular, to the ways that space and individuals are defined in racial terms such that the unjust treatment of Nonwhites identified with nonwhite spaces can be understood as congruent with the standards of egalitarianism that the society claims apply to all, but which, in practice, often apply to Whites only (Mills, 1997, 2007). That this is the case seems well borne
out in such phenomena as the historical terms of the American constitution (Mills, 2007, p. 27); the existence of a separate Indian Act to define and regulate Aboriginal people in Canada, the foreign policy of “Western” nations (Razack, 2004; Taylor, 2007); the disparate standards for and outcomes of education for Whites and Nonwhites (see, e.g., Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Campbell, 1995; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Outlaw, 2007); matters of racial profiling and attendant police brutality demonstrating a racialization of perception (Butler, 1993; Tanovich, 2006); disparities between the sentences given to Whites and Nonwhites for the same crimes; the fact that in the US intent must be proved when challenging the racist effects of government policy (Bell, 1980, p. 527) but need not be proved when challenging inequitable outcomes based on age (Hoagland, 2007, p. 96) … . The examples are numerous. As we examine these and other examples, I would suggest that we are not witnessing the proffering of competing definitions or versions of “reality” that ask us to determine which is “truth” and which is not. Rather, the issue is that having already “fashioned a world” (Cormier, 2007, p. 71) in which the equitable treatment of all humans without regard to social identity is the “truth” that is claimed, there are astonishing material disparities that persist based on race and the other social identities we claim ought not to matter. This constitutes the Racial Contract that Mills posits. The state of affairs whereby signatories to this Racial Contract do not recognize this contradiction or are inclined to explain it away, or the fact that they are evidently not disturbed by or moved to resolve this contradiction constitute what Mills names the epistemology of ignorance. Ironically, Cormier’s standard of determining truth—that is, on the basis of whether it makes “life, thought, and the world better” (p. 74)—not only seems to invoke the kind of overarching, universal truth
principle against which he argues, but it also seems to clarify exactly what Mills claims that white signatories to the Racial Contract seem unable to do if the definition of better is consistent with their egalitarian values. If the ability to apply this standard amounts to “truth” as Cormier suggests, then the inability to do so counts as ignorance. Ultimately then, Cormier’s arguments agree with Mills’s.

Cormier’s concern about being able to determine whether and which particular Black subjects have escaped the effects of the epistemology of ignorance need not, then, be as troubling as he suggests. Theoretical analyses positing the racial locatedness of knowledge (e.g., Asante, 1998, 1999, 2002; Dei, 2000b, 2006a, 2008c; Mills, 1997; wa Thiong’o, 1986) do not claim unchallengeable Black or nonwhite epistemic authority on matters of race, and are, indeed, occupied with the problem of theorizing the nonwhite body that embraces whiteness. Further, the Black embodied knowledge of race that I propose in Chapter 4 depends upon the process of developing knowledge in a white supremacist context over time as dehumanizing understandings of the oppressed come into conflict with the fact of their/our humanity—that is, what may be seen as an unfolding decolonization of the self. While it does suggest that Blacks know in important and particular ways that Whites cannot, it does not require that any Black individual know absolutely or infallibly, and indeed, it is good antiracist practice to maintain humility with regard to the extent to which one knows (see Dei, 2008c, p. 76), and resist “academic closure” (2008c, p. 78). As the racially oppressed, we are ever building on and critically assessing the antiracist/anticolonial work that has been done by those before us, and ever pressing on toward a full expression of liberty that may not be realized on either the personal or societal level within our lifetimes. In particular, as Blacks and
Afrocentric scholars, we are in a process of reclamation whereby we define and study ourselves on our own terms, asserting our own agency, rather than continuing to work within dominant Eurocentric terms that make Africans objects rather than subjects (see Asante, 1999, pp. xiv-xv; Dei et al., 2004, p. 9; Kershaw, 1992, p. 167). We need not be caught within the terms of Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge that require that our knowledge be unchallengeable.

This also brings the discussion to the point where this study builds on Mills’s insights. Mills takes the space to outline the differences between the normative ends of “individualist epistemology” and of the “social epistemology” he proposes (Mills, 2007, p. 23). He explains that the former seeks to provide an appreciation of the individual reasoning processes that generate false belief and those that will assist individuals to steer clear of them. Analogously, he claims that a social epistemology is concerned with “supra-individual processes” (p. 23) from which it may be difficult to disentangle oneself. Mills then goes on to claim that the white person “has a better chance of getting things right through a self-conscious recognition of their existence, and corresponding self-distancing from them” (p. 23). Within the context of these structurally produced white epistemologies, I choose not to understand this as some simplistic matter of “awareness” or “sensitivity” that results in the sudden and easy transformation of the formerly “ignorant” racist white subject into the “enlightened” antiracist one. Such an understanding would underestimate the extent to which, indeed, the processes at work are structural ones that accrue to the white body despite the individual’s personal motivations (See Howard, 2004, p. 74). Certainly, the goal of a social epistemology would be to attempt to provide some form of corrective to the societally-based dilemma at hand—in
this case, white ignorance. However, without denying the agency of white subjects to struggle against white dominance and the terms of the Racial Contract that seeks to conscript them, it seems unreasonable to suggest that this would occur (particularly in the context of an epistemology of ignorance and the dominant assumptions of white competence discussed in Chapter 5) by the assertion or substitution of yet another type of white knowledge and authority by white individuals.

In her critique of Critical Whiteness Studies, Ahmed (2004, paras. 38-40) problematizes this type of solution to the dilemmas of whiteness. She writes:

The fantasy that organises [sic] this new white subject/knowledge formation is that studying whiteness will make white people, “self-conscious and critical”. This is a progressive story: the white subject, by learning (about themselves?) will no longer take for granted or even disavow their whiteness. The fantasy presumes that to be critical and self-conscious is a good thing, and is even the condition of possibility for anti-racism …. I suspect one can be a self-conscious white racist, but that’s beside the point. The point is that racism is not simply about “ignorance”, or stereotypical knowledge. We can learn about racism and express white privilege in the very presumption of the entitlement to learn or to self-consciousness. We could even recall here the Marxian critique of self-consciousness as predicated on the distinction between mental and manual labour, and as supported by the concealment of the manual labour of others (Marx and Engels 1969). Indeed, if learning about whiteness becomes a subject skill and a subject specific skill, then “learned Whites” are precisely “given privilege” over others, whether those others are “unlearned Whites” or learning or unlearned nonwhite others. Studying whiteness can involve the claiming of a privileged white identity as the subject who knows. My argument suggests that we cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege. (para. 40, emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Ahmed is particularly concerned about the ways that white claims to critical knowledge about race can become an identity-making phenomenon that at once not only sets apart the white subject who claims it from other (presumably ignorant, racist) Whites, but also provides grounds for asserting knowledge over Nonwhites who do not have access to the same privilege to acquire the same kinds of academic
knowledge. Indeed, I would add that there is often even the tendency to claim authority over Nonwhites who have had the same kinds of academic training, in which case the experience of being nonwhite is seen as interfering with seeing objectively. In other words, the claim to this critical knowledge of racism can become another expression of a particular form of white authority bolstered by the “objective distance” that only the white body can claim.

We should note that when Ahmed says that the problem of racism is “not simply about ignorance” (para. 40), she speaks of ignorance as the void or epistemic negligence that it is usually understood to be, not as the powerful epistemology that Mills proposes it is in a white supremacist society. However, Mills’s epistemology of ignorance and Ahmed’s claims complement each other because the analytical value of the concept of an epistemology of ignorance as substance rather than absence is in the recognition that overcoming it does not imply simply filling a void with the “right” kind of knowledge, or “banking” knowledge into subjects considered *tabula rasa* (see Freire, 1972, chapter 2). Rather, it implies recognizing that a particular construction of knowledge—even if this is through an epistemology of ignorance—is already in place, and that this therefore needs to be undone rather than superimposed upon.

Further, antiracism and anticolonial scholars have long pointed out that for every oppression that the oppressed experience there is a corresponding privilege for the dominant (See e.g., Dei et al., 2004, p. 87; Memmi, 1969, p. 8; See also Dei, 2008c, p. 21; Howard, 2006, p. 47). If the epistemology of ignorance makes it such that “Whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 1997, p. 18), then it is demonstrated in the inability of the dominant to recognize the
symbiotic relationship between privilege and oppression. Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) explain:

It is important to realize that oppressor and oppressed alike are impacted by their positionings in these hierarchies. For example, a White middle-class man’s societal placement, his experiences and his opportunities are fully understandable only in relation to the social conditions and oppressions of those located outside that locus of privilege …

… the “realities of racial oppression” remain obscured to the commonsense gaze precisely because any interrogations of those “relations of power” presuppose the ability to think relationally and in abstract terms. Because White privilege is infused into the norms of their everyday lives, it becomes a difficult aspect of experience to separate and recognize, let alone implicate. … while the racially privileged may recognize the existence of [racial] oppression, they often do so without perceiving the relational tissue that runs between that oppression and their power. … the ability to ignore the implications discussed here arises directly out of that privilege. (p. 83)

Thus, the substance (as opposed to absence) which constitutes the epistemology of ignorance is, in fact, its generation of real material conditions of privilege for some and oppression for others. The epistemology of ignorance creates the bizarre possibility for the white subject to recognize racial oppression and seek to challenge it without recognizing that this implies also challenging white dominance and white privilege—specifically including one’s own. However, if the epistemology of ignorance is so well rooted in privilege, and so dependent upon oppression, it follows that overcoming it involves both unlearning current ways of knowing/being and acquiring new ways of knowing/being that are incompatible with those with which s/he has previously been familiar.

Finally, since the epistemology of ignorance is a structurally determined way of knowing associated with the white body, it is an embodied knowledge that is intricately woven into white identity. If, then, the whiteness of the white body is dependent upon ongoing relationships of racial dominance, and is not easily or ever “abolished” in the
present historical moment, as many scholars have insisted (Giroux, 1997a; Giroux, 1997b; Kincheloe et al., 1998; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000), it seems clear that the unlearning process—that is, the undoing of the epistemology of ignorance—cannot be through self-consciousness (particularly if that means being aware of oneself as white and of one’s white privilege), and it is never complete in this historical moment. Further, though Whites can acquire and live by antiracism knowledge, they can never *embody* antiracism knowledge or come to it through an embodied epistemology. Indeed the long-term inhabiting of the white body within the white supremacist context tends toward the normalization and entrenchment/embodiment of white privilege rather than a critique of it. The white racial equity worker may come to notice incongruity between the societal presumptions of white supremacy and what s/he observes through daily experience, but this is never come at through the racial positioning of the white body. Their antiracism knowledge comes through other channels (see Section 4.7).

Thus, I take Mills’s assertion that the white person resist the epistemology of ignorance through a “self-conscious recognition of their existence, and corresponding self-distancing from them” (p. 23) to mean that the white person must become aware that s/he embodies white privilege and power and, therefore, a particular embodied knowledge (i.e. an epistemology of ignorance). The “self-distancing” is therefore an ongoing, never quite finished process. In short, the epistemology of ignorance cannot be replaced with an epistemology of knowledge or authority, but rather must be undone
through an epistemology of unknowing. The epistemology of unknowing, through a process of constantly and consistently negating prior (embodied) knowledge (or more accurately, ignorance), creates the grounds for Whites to know differently (though not completely or infallibly).

To summarize, then, I assert:

1) Overcoming the white epistemology of ignorance will not occur through a simplistic process of raising white awareness. To suggest otherwise would be to work with the notion of ignorance as absence. The notion of the epistemology of ignorance suggests that this ignorance is a “substantive epistemic practice in itself” (Alcoff, 2007, p. 39, emphasis in original), and thus cannot simply be superimposed upon.

2) Within the context of white supremacy that assumes white epistemic authority, overcoming the white epistemology of ignorance (which is partly constituted by this assumption) cannot occur through a process of claiming another form of white knowledge and authority. This is particularly so if this white knowledge simultaneously separates the white subject who claims it from other Whites, and allows her/him to claim a form of epistemic authority over Nonwhites who might be considered to have false consciousness (Ahmed, 2004, para 40; see also Delpit, 1988, p. 297). Ascribing this kind of authority to the white antiracist re-entrenches the terms of racial inequity and white innocence.

32 Here, I choose the term unknowing rather than the term unlearning, which would be another possibility. The term unlearning speaks to me of a neat finite process. I use the term unknowing to convey a sense of the long-term constantly contested and messy process that I understand overcoming the epistemology of ignorance to entail.
3) The epistemology of ignorance can only be overcome through an epistemology of unknowing—an ongoing process of negating white racialized common sense.

4) There is no way to completely undo the epistemology of ignorance without challenging and completely dismantling the terms of racial inequity along with the history of meanings generated by racially inequitable society. The white epistemology of ignorance exists in symbiotic relationship with white privilege and nonwhite oppression. Since the white subject cannot escape the white body, and since the epistemology of ignorance accrues through structural processes to the white body, the epistemology of ignorance cannot be eradicated within the present historical moment.

5) White antiracist knowledge is, of course, possible, but is not come at through the body and is therefore not embodied. To suggest otherwise would be a contradiction. White antiracist knowledge is come at through an ongoing epistemology of unknowing that is largely propositional rather than implicit (refer to Section 4.9.2) and which, in fact, contradicts the (embodied) implicit knowledge (or epistemology of ignorance) that the white body is positioned to have within a white supremacist society. However, since this epistemology of unknowing cannot undo the structurally determined whiteness of the white body and the knowledge that accrues to it through structural processes, the white antiracist’s knowledge is never supported by her/his embodiment in white supremacist society.

Thus, I have proposed an epistemology of unknowing as the appropriate epistemic stance for Whites who would be involved in racial equity work. What must be fleshed
out is what this ongoing unlearning looks like and how it sets terms for interracial collaboration in racial equity work. I submit that the participants in this study give us some initial insights about this, and these will be the focus of the following section.

7.2.2 The Epistemology of Unknowing for the White Racial Equity Worker

A recurrent word and theme in the research interviews with the Black racial equity workers was that white racial equity workers need to “understand.” When they expressed the ways in which they want their white colleagues to know in order to be effective colleagues in racial equity work, they wanted them to “understand” or to “have and understanding,” as in the following excerpt:

Keith: They have to also be grounded in the community and understand the issues before they put themselves on the front line and say, “OK, well I am here and I’m from a white perspective, I’m also trying to fight racism in the community.” It’s different for a privileged white person to fight racism, unless they thoroughly understand it.

while those they found wanting in terms of their effectiveness in racial equity work were said not to “understand,” as in the following excerpt:

Beverly: Yes. But it’s because of lack of understanding. You know, because they will say things like, “Oh, but I didn’t mean that. I wasn’t racist.” Or, “Why can’t they participate? The opportunity is there.” But they don’t understand that the opportunity as they see it might be opportunity that is seen very differently by a Black person.

What I found interesting in these expressions was how often this “understanding” of which the participants spoke actually seemed to imply a negation of prior knowledge rather than an acquisition of new knowledge. In other words, what the Black racial equity workers wanted their colleagues to understand was the limitation of their knowledge and experience rather than some supplementary knowledge to be added to
what they already knew. As shall be discussed below, they wanted them to understand what/that they don’t know, understand what they can’t know, and understand the limitations placed upon them in racial equity work by white identity. Specifically, they wanted them to unknow epistemic authority, unknow innocence, and unknow exaggerated white agency. They also sought an acknowledgement (of the things) that Blacks know and that this Black knowledge cannot be ignored or dismissed. This section weaves together the participants’ various articulations of this white understanding as unknowing with other ways in which the participants insist that their white colleagues should pay attention to the limits of their knowledge. Throughout the section, I will underline the word understand and its variations where they occur in the excerpts to assist the reader to connect the understanding the participants seek to the epistemology of unknowing for which I argue, and to connect the lack of understanding with the epistemology of ignorance and dominant ways of knowing.

7.2.2.1 Unknowing Epistemic Authority: Understanding the Limits and Situatedness of White Knowledge

In Section 5.6.2, I have already discussed the general presumptions of white competence and credibility that are made in Euro-North American society. These presumptions clearly suggest that white knowledge is considered to be superior and “more valid” than other types of knowledge. The participants in this study pointed to the way that these presumptions intrude into racial equity work. The participants pointed to a tendency in their white colleagues to claim authoritative knowledge, and then to assume leadership in racial equity work based on that claim. For example, Beverly relates:

**Beverly:** But what I find is that—and it’s a cultural thing—I find that white males on the whole, because they hold the balance of power within the country, I
find that it’s the same way that even in doing antiracist work, it seems as if they know it all. So whereas someone like Sheila [Beverly’s white colleague] is willing to listen, willing to understand, there is a whole comfort zone that white males—and I’m generalizing here too—find themselves in that it’s much more harder for them to get out of that comfort zone than the female Whites are able to get out.

Similarly, Diane says:

**Diane**: The disadvantages [of collaborating with Whites in racial equity work] I’ve already talked about are in terms of the sort of take-over mentality, the desire to take ownership of your experiences, the inability to admit that you’re the expert in your own oppression.

I would not agree with Beverly’s assessment that the presumption of authority is cultural. Rather, I would argue that it is the result of benefiting from the normalization of white racial privilege (as well as male gender privilege) in white and male supremacist society, and the constant reinforcement of the societal message of white superiority. However, these excerpts indicate the connection that the participants make between their colleagues’ presumption that they know authoritatively—even about nonwhite experience—and their tendency to usurp leadership in ways that their Black colleagues take exception to and resist. Thus, one lack of understanding the participants see in their white colleagues is expressed in a tendency to dismiss nonwhite knowledge and to dismiss the possibility that Nonwhites may know differently than Whites in important ways. Ajani connects this tendency on the microsocial level to what he sees as a macrosocial tendency for white knowledge to be seen as universal. He states:

**Ajani**: There’s a book that I found one day in some book sale, and it highlighted something … the book was called “Our Modern History.” … I say all that just to say that all of this “our modern history” was all in reference to Europe, and that’s an assumption that is ingrained in the cultural reference and in the behaviours. So, the reason why I mention this book is because if I was looking to work with someone [white], a lot of times there’s this underlining assumption of dominance

---

33 Here again, a racial phenomenon is being attributed to culture—a common misconception in a colour-blind society.
that’s the opposite of what I’m looking for if I’m working with someone … They don’t even have to say “our world,” they just say world—“world war” and you know they are talking from a certain reference. So I say all that just to say: that I think, is one of the hugest issues—that assumption of standard, assumption of dominance—and, you know, basically what you’re talking about is white supremacy. And it may not be overt, so it may show itself in very subtle ways. You know, it’s the same thing when we say, you know, “mankind” “he did this” and “man did this” and “he did that.”

These racialized presumptions and claims to a universal human experience (which, as Beverly and Ajani point out, are often also gendered) are part of what the participants in the study want their white colleagues to unknow as part of their coming to know differently and as part of the terms upon which they can do good and respectful racial equity work. The understanding that they would like their white colleagues to work on, and that would represent this unknowing, consists of a realization of the “provincial” (Asante, 2003, p. 38) nature of their (white “Western”) knowledge, and its limited scope and application. Maryam describes this understanding:

**Maryam:** So, what it is important is for white people to be interested in learning more, and to think that there is a world outside Western world. Once you say, “Oh, and people live, and people enjoy. Oh, I want to be courteous, I want to understand how—.” And try to avoid judgment and try to work with your lenses of prejudice.

In this excerpt, Maryam again pulls several thoughts together that are incompletely expressed because of her lack of comfort with English. However, we can see that she asks that her white colleagues understand that their knowledge is culturally and racially situated, and that there are indeed other ways of seeing and knowing than those with which they are acquainted. The excerpt also suggests that the process of “work[ing] with your lenses of prejudice” (i.e. grasping the effects of the social frameworks that shape the white person’s view of the world) and the process of coming to realize and respect that there are many who happily live their lives outside “Western” norms and expectations are
simultaneous, interdependent processes that are important for Whites who would do racial equity work to engage.

Similarly, many of the participants object when their white colleagues claim expert knowledge about the lives of others. Maryam protests:

Maryam: And the same thing about hijab. For her [her white colleague] it’s like, “Why do women need to wear a hijab to go to work or to go to school?” And for me, it’s their problem. It’s their problem, it’s *their* beliefs. And she’s telling me, “No! It’s oppression towards women.”

And I’m telling her “No! It’s not oppression. In my religion it’s—, I would do it. I would wear that hijab, but I am not very courageous. I don’t have the courage of putting a scarf on my head. For me it’s a righteous thing.” And I’m telling her, “You know, it’s my culture. Let me tell you about it.” You see? There is the perception of understanding the other, the *needs* of the other. And I’m telling her, “I know!”

And she’s telling me, “Yes, but I can assume that.”

Here Maryam describes a struggle with a white colleague to interpret the head scarf worn by some Muslim women. Her white colleague insists that it represents gender oppression, while Maryam, speaking as a member of a culture and religion in which it is worn, struggles to challenge this imposed interpretation and to classify it as a more complex decision made by Muslim women, at least in Canada (see Zine, 2004, p. 226). Maryam objects to her colleague’s over-confidence to assert her own interpretation while rejecting the salience of Maryam’s interpretation, though Maryam is, herself, a Muslim woman. Maryam’s resolute statement, “… it’s my culture. Let me tell you about it!”, represents her insistence that the white colleague unknow her presumed expert knowledge about an experience that is not hers, and that she be willing to recognize the right of those who do have that experience to speak for themselves, and to have their perspectives seriously considered.
Those white racial equity workers who are not working on acquiring the understanding that the participants in this study say they need to acquire not only dismiss the perspectives of the racially oppressed, but also deny the reality and validity of their experiences. Imani tells us:

**Imani**: So they don’t have that empathy towards someone else in a department or in a school or in a—, who’s feeling it [racial oppression] because they don’t understand it. Sometimes they even argue against it.

Indeed, in stark demonstration of the epistemology of ignorance and the arrogance of some white knowledge, there is often an accompanying obliviousness on the part of some white racial equity workers to the fact that they are engaging in these dismissals and denials. Imani relates how her racial equity work has required her to challenge the sense of arrogance that gives rise to these dismissals. She relates:

**Imani**: ’Cause sometimes, you know, you’ll be called to speak to some issue, and they’ll say, “All I said was—.”

And I’ll say, “You said it where? You said it when? You said it in front of whom? And you said it how? And you say all you said was—? Well,” I said, “Now, let’s go through this again. You reprimanded that teacher in front of the parent who has been abusive to her without even hearing what the teacher said. You formulated a side. And then you spoke to her about her not understanding [saying,] ‘That’s not what was meant,’ implying that she has less comprehension ability than [you]?” I said, “What are you talking about?”

And they say, “Oh I never thought.”

We see in the above excerpt how the epistemology of ignorance causes this white person to totally dismiss all the contextual clues that should have been taken into account, resulting ultimately in the outright denial and dismissal of the way the Black person in this incident might read and understand the circumstances. It is only when these certainties are challenged that the possibility of entertaining other perspectives becomes possible.
By contrast, the epistemology of unknowing for which I am arguing through the
narratives of the study participants, if followed through to its logical conclusions,
automatically gives way for the recognition and respecting of the knowledge and
experience of the (racially) oppressed, illustrating the way in which unknowing becomes
an epistemology well suited to Whites who would do racial equity work. Diane insists on
this type of understanding as a prerequisite for Whites doing racial equity work:

**Diane:** So I would have to have an **understanding** that when you are talking about
the oppression of whatever group it is—if you’re talking about the oppression of
people with AIDS, if you’re talking about the oppression of homosexuals, if
you’re talking about the oppression of Asians, of Black people—they are the
people who actually know what that feels like and what it looks like, **and** they
quite often have the solutions to it.

Imani also argues for the same type of unknowing that will yield to a recognition and
respect for the knowledge of the racially oppressed. She says, speaking as to the white
racial equity worker:

**Imani:** Recognize that though you’re doing this work, you’re not substituting for
the race community. They **still** know more than you know. Maybe not in terms of
the processes and the—, but they **know**, they **feel**, they **understand** what’s going
on. So don’t try to dupe them, or don’t try to think, “I know better because I’m
doing this work.” And don’t talk down to them. Because remember when you’re
up there doing your workshops, you’re teaching **them** about **them**.

What stands out here is that the participants express what they want their white
colleagues to understand in terms of what they do not want them to assume and do not
want them to do. This represents a genuine unknowing and humility of knowledge as
further illustrated in the following excerpt:

**Imani:** So we **can’t** say, “I understand because I have this problem and it’s just
like your problem,” because it may be, but it’s not exactly. So I would say to
them [white racial equity workers], “Be sensitive. Don’t think you know it all
even though you know a great deal. … you’ve **gotta** learn to listen. “Oh is that
your experience? Oh. Thanks for telling me that. I’m beginning to **understand**.”
Not “I know how you feel.” Very, very different. … I know there are a **lot** of
people who say, “I know exactly what you feel.” Because once you’ve taken the
trouble and the time to become sensitive to other people, you have the tendency to put it all in a nice little neat box and say, “I understand exactly.” And I say, “Uh-uh. You don’t. You don’t! There’s always that little bit.”

Clearly, there is the suggestion that the understanding is never complete, which harmonizes with what I have argued is a feature of the epistemology of unknowing which overcomes the epistemology of ignorance. Note also Imani’s suggestion that it is precisely those who have seen the importance of being sensitive to others who need to be careful not to slip into speaking for others.

Summarizing, then, for the participants in this study, one of the “understandings” that they want their white colleagues to have involves recognizing their own knowledge as neither authoritative nor universal. This unknowing of the assumed authority and universality of white racial and cultural knowledge sets the stage for recognizing and respecting the experiential, cultural, and embodied knowledge of the racially oppressed, and for taking seriously their accounts of their experiences with racial oppression. The unknowing is a vehicle to knowing, and to these participants it is an essential prerequisite for racial equity work.

7.2.2.2  Unknown innocence: Understanding one’s implication in whiteness

Another understanding that the participants wish their white colleagues to have is related to the missionary approach and expectations of gratitude discussed in Section 6.2.2. As I argued in that section, these approaches and expectations flow from a sense of innocence and largesse that, however well intentioned, is misplaced in the context of racial equity work. This is because the sense of innocence and largesse is deeply rooted in a white identity defined in opposition to, and as superior to, nonwhite (and particularly Black) identities. I argued that this innocence and benevolence makes impossible the
sense of social justice, responsibility, and accountability upon which effective antiracism is built.

If the primary function of racist ideologies is to legitimize the differential and inferior treatment of “other” human beings, the primary function of the epistemology of ignorance whereby “Whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 1997, p. 18) is to allow the racially dominant to maintain and continue to benefit from the conditions of racial oppression while simultaneously being able to regard themselves and their society as egalitarian, fair, just—that is, as innocent of racial oppression. Getting involved in racial equity work, then, requires that this innocence borne of ignorance be challenged. Scheurich (2002) writes:

In general, I find that we [Whites] are very good at criticizing the inequitable world. But this overload, this imbalance in one direction toward the critique of the world out there is itself a failure of critical theory, an instance of reproduction within ourselves of the white racist ontology. In other words, by not attending to the nature of our own subjectivity, and the role it plays in the reproduction of an inequitable status quo, we too are guilty of participating in the creation of that status quo. We can criticize the world out there day after day, but if we don’t also criticize our own subjectivity, we leave one of the main tropes of white racist modernism not only untouched but also active in reproduction. (p. 156)

In this section, I present the participants’ demand that their white colleagues unlearn their sense of innocence and, in its place begin the self-critique that Scheurich promotes which will allow them to grasp an understanding of how they are implicated in relations of race. For the white racial equity worker, innocence is expressed in three ways:

a) ignorance of the stability of white identities despite the personal politics of the white individual, which results in a sense of personal innocence of racism
b) misunderstanding inequitable relations of race resulting in a sense of *collective* white innocence

c) failure to understand how whiteness affects the relationships between themselves and their Black colleagues in racial equity work.

As a result of these claims of innocence, the Black racial equity workers in this study advocate for the following types of understanding:

First, the Black racial equity workers in this study assert that white racial equity workers should understand that they are racially privileged whatever their personal race politics, and that their own involvement in racial equity work does not exempt them from their implication in racist social relations or from susceptibility to enacting racism. Diane, for example, demands:

**Diane:** It has to be acknowledged that you’re white. It has to be acknowledged that you, whether or not you’re conscious of it, you have had advantages because of skin colour.

Here, Diane is aware that the white person may not understand the salience of her/his white body. She therefore insists that the white racial equity worker should have a sense of how the white body privileges her/him on the social landscape to receive social and material advantage based on racial identification.

Beyond the recognition of one’s privilege, Diane also insists that the white racial equity worker recognize the ways in which whiteness may seduce the white body into enacting inequitable relations of race:

**Diane:** They have to be people who believe in social justice—people who can recognize oppression when they see it, and who are willing to admit that even they can be oppressors and in fact do come from the oppressor group.
It is interesting to note that Diane’s requirement that the white racial equity worker be committed to social justice does not preclude, and indeed demands, that s/he maintain a real understanding of how whiteness adheres to the white body and inheres in white identities. As I have discussed elsewhere (Howard, 2006, p. 53), all too often Whites who become involved in antiracist initiatives or spaces consider themselves to be immune to enacting racism. This results in a “we-enlightened-Whites versus those-other-racist-Whites” identity dynamic that undermines the sense of accountability appropriate to antiracism work. Instead, Diane defines the understanding required in the white racial equity worker as requiring cautiousness in this regard.

Diane: I believe there is a category of white people who do sort of “get it” in the sense that they recognize that they are part of the oppressor group and that everybody in that group, everybody in my mind, is capable of oppressing others based on skin colour.

For Diane, “getting it” requires relinquishing the quick and easy self-absolution and separation from other Whites so often seen in these circumstances, and instead, grasping a more appropriate sense of the tenuousness and “unfinished-ness” of the white antiracist identity (see e.g., Manglitz et al., 2005, p. 1258). This will lead to an ongoing vigilance and self-examination that the participants in this study find effective in white racial equity workers.

Second, in addition to understanding that involvement in racial equity work does not neatly set the white racial equity worker apart from other Whites or prevent her/him from enacting racism, the study participants further argue that their white colleagues need to understand their implication in the racial conditions they are working against. Sharon says:
Sharon: They [Whites] should understand that when you do antiracism work, you’re not there to save anybody. That’s the first thing. If they’re coming at it from a missionary position, they and I have nothing to talk about. That’s the first thing. They have to understand how they’re implicated in this, and accept how they’re implicated in this. … So the focus has to be on how my whiteness gives me power. And a really clear understanding of that, and a really clear understanding of how it works. Not in the abstract, not because you read a book, but you can see how it works in the everyday world. Then, what is your responsibility around that when you know this?

Here, Sharon rejects outright the missionary approach indicating that she is not willing to collaborate with the white racial equity worker who takes this stance. Sharon argues that the missionary approach reveals a faulty understanding of racial inequity and the implication of white bodies in it. She therefore insists that white racial equity workers unknow this sense of collective white innocence and personal benevolence by coming to an understanding of the connections between whiteness and racial inequity. She argues that the racial equity worker should become keenly aware of the ways that whiteness is structurally bound up in racial inequity, and the ways that white identities are dependent upon these structures. The result of such an understanding is that the white racial equity worker’s involvement in racial equity work comes to be understood as accountability and responsibility rather than as largesse. Sharon goes on to say:

Sharon: Check your whiteness! Know how you’re implicated in this. … It’s not about you positioning yourself as a do-gooder. It’s a much more serious issue than that. And understand that the sorts of things that you go to talk about in an antiracism workshop are precisely the sorts of things that people like you have created. You made these conditions possible. So when you come and talk to a group of folks about why they need to do equity work and antiracism work, you need to point that out—that the very conditions that we’re struggling against are conditions that you created. It’s only when we have that understanding—. And not coming from blame, not coming from, you know, “you need to feel bad about this,” but these are the conditions. These are the realities.
Reiterating her rejection of the understanding of white racial equity work as benevolence undertaken with the motive of helping the less fortunate (see Section 6.2.1), Sharon adds that the required unknowing and understanding involves being up-front as a white racial equity worker about the historical and ongoing role of Whites and white racial dominance in creating, reproducing, and failing to challenge inequitable relations of race. This acknowledgement is undertaken both by specifying the white racial equity worker’s personal understanding of the ongoing significance of her/his white identity, even as s/he does racial equity work—which I have argued elsewhere is an indispensable step (see Howard, 2006, p. 58)—as well as by raising this awareness among Whites to whom the white racial equity worker may be presenting. It therefore seems that once the white racial equity worker has acquired the type of understanding that produces accountability and responsibility, it opens up an entire dimension of racial equity work that is not normally addressed by white racial equity workers who take a missionary approach.

Speaking to this effect, Diane says:

**Diane:** I’ll be brutally honest here. I don’t really know any white people who are doing work in their own community, the oppressor community, in terms of looking at why it is white people feel they need to oppress others—or even subconscious racism, OK? So I don’t really know anybody who is doing that work. I know people who are working against racism as a white person who is standing up and actually naming it in white institutions or in other contexts … So I do know people who are effective at doing that. In terms of going out into their own communities, though, and saying, you know, “Let’s do antiracism in this context as oppressors. What makes us oppressors? Where does this ideology come from? Do we examine our subconscious beliefs? And if so, how do we go about doing that, and how can we eradicate our oppressor stance?” That’s the kind of work that needs to be done that I don’t think is being done.

Putting Sharon’s and Diane’s insights together, we can conclude that the lack of personal and group self-reflexive antiracist work among Whites will be addressed to the extent that innocence and the missionary approach are unknown, and the sense of accountability
and responsibility is learned. It is worth reiterating here that the white person’s engagement in racial equity work does not guarantee that this understanding is in place.

Third, the participants in this study suggest that there should be an understanding that examining the dynamics of interracial relationship within racial equity collaborations is as important as examining interracial relationships in the society at large. Maryam says:

Maryam: When it comes to equity, in a lot of departments in the public service, you can see that it’s done by white people, people who have never worked in antiracism organizations. Yeah, you see people working on equity things and on work relationship, and its amazing to see that they have no clue about what they are talking! No expertise, no understanding, no background! But if it comes to an organization where it’s antiracism, I think the first thing is to acknowledge that there is a thing—to acknowledge and to share the experiences and to develop a kind of—. Because we are not—. It’s a power thing. The racism is a power thing. It’s very important for the employees, for example, to develop good relations and to see themselves, project themselves in where they are in terms of relationship with the power; [say,] “The power is here!” And the power you know that it’s white, it’s Anglo-Saxon, it’s Christian. It’s important that the employees know where they situate themselves in that.

Maryam tells us that in order to be effective, racial equity workers need to be constantly aware of the power dynamics at work within the racial equity team. To this end, Maryam advises that the members of the team explicitly map out how they are positioned with respect to each other in terms of social relationships of power and inequity based on race and other axes of social inequity. She goes on to say that this practice will make explicit the diverse life experiences represented on the team, allow the team to draw on this diverse experience by asking appropriate questions, which will then help them to strategize how they will approach their racial equity projects and decide who might best provide leadership in specific projects.

Maryam: And [the idea that] “He’s Black, he’s white, we’re brothers. No there is no problem. … Now you’re going to enjoy the same thing,” it’s not true! It’s
putting a Band-Aid on. So don’t—. *What should happen from the time* you start working, [you should say], “OK. A Black, Muslim male. How do you—? Let us know! We don’t understand. Can you develop—? What kind of messages—? How can we—?” And the person who is Black, male and Muslim is going to have the lead on that.

Sharon describes an instance in her experience where this strategy was not in place. In this instance her white colleague did not understand the dynamics of racial inequity in society at large, let alone how they might operate within the antiracism team. She explains:

**Sharon:** It was the lack of analysis around power. It was the lack of understanding of power and privilege. Ahm, it was her lack of understanding of anything critical, really. Because even if she didn’t see it as a race issue, she didn’t even see it as a gender issue—like relations between Black and white women and the history around that, right? So she wasn’t able to check herself around her behaviour on those sorts of things. I really didn’t think that she had the skills to understand the power dynamics around our relationship, and relationships with other women around the office, because it was predominantly an office of women and some men.

This white racial equity worker’s inattention to power imbalances and diversity of experience within the team prevented her from being mindful about her susceptibility to acting inequitably toward her colleagues on the basis of her normalized privilege. This ultimately compromised her effectiveness in racial equity work.

On the other hand, Sharon also shares an experience of working with a colleague who did have the requisite understanding to navigate the relationships within the racial equity team. She recounts:

**Sharon:** She really understood what it meant to be white and the power that she had around what that meant, so we could have some really honest conversation. And the sorts of things that we would do in workshops, understanding that when I say certain things it’s not listened to or heard in quite the same way, but when it comes from her it’s taken up very differently. So she had a really good understanding of how this thing worked.
In this case, the white racial equity worker was able to take into account the implications of the different ways in which she and her Black colleague were positioned in the social landscape. This deepened the collegial relationship between them\textsuperscript{34} and allowed them to be able to take these unequal relationships to social power into account in their racial equity work.

As a final point, this understanding of the racial and power dynamics within the racial equity team would flow naturally from the first understanding discussed in this section—that is, that involvement in racial equity work does not exempt the white racial equity worker from implication in inequitable relations of race.

In conclusion to this section, then, the participants in this study assert that their white colleagues need to unlearn the sense of innocence that they often bring to racial equity work that results from the underestimation of the continuing salience of the white body in racist society. As I have noted elsewhere:

\begin{quote}
Only the habit of white privilege could allow any white body, antiracist or otherwise, to feel that s/he can, at will, easily shake off the manner in which one’s body is taken up by a white supremacist system when people of color have been struggling to do so for centuries. For white scholars not to consider the enduring meaning and salience of race and skin color while they try to forge out antiracist positions for themselves reads like a trivialisation or disregard of the realities of those of us who, on the basis of skin colour, continue to be buffeted by racism whether we like it or not. (Howard, 2004, p. 74)
\end{quote}

This sense of innocence can only be replaced when the white racial equity worker embraces her/his ongoing implication in societal relationships of race, and begins to grasp the impact of these relationships upon the teambuilding and racial equity work they do with Blacks.

\textsuperscript{34} See Tatum, 1997, pp. 59-60 for a discussion of the effect of such validation on interracial relationships.
7.2.2.3 Unknowing unlimited white agency: Understanding nonwhite community space

Ajani’s observations and the discussion in Sections 6.1 and 6.4.1 drew brief attention to the exaggerated sense of agency that some white racial equity workers may have. This section will extend the discussion, pointing out where the study participants see this exaggerated sense of white agency as something that the white racial equity worker must unlearn by understanding the limits of their agency and entitlement.

Speaking of the benefits and pitfalls of collaborations between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work, Ajani says:

**Ajani:** I would say you can definitely, ahm, benefit from the connections that are available within a white supremacy to a white person that are not available to others. I think that’s part of a double-sided blade where it can also allow for your trusted inside man to be lost because they’re in this situation where they have access, they have a sense of greater importance {laughs} than truly any one person really does have. So, I think that can make someone say, “Hey!” you know, “I did this!” you know what I mean? “This is me!” or “You need me,” or whatever it may be. It can cause some dysfunction.

The exaggerated white agency arises when the white racial equity worker attributes to herself as an individual that which, in actual fact, accrues to her only because of how she is positioned within inequitable structures that may be invisible to her. Recalling the symbiotic relationship between privilege and oppression, we can see that the exaggerated sense of agency for Whites, because of its attribution of structural factors to the individual and his merits, is the privilege for Whites that directly corresponds to the oppressive effects of the “blame the victim” tendency that attributes to nonwhite individuals the full responsibility for the disadvantages that accrue to them because of their nonwhiteness. In the above excerpt, Ajani points out that the effectiveness of the white racial equity worker (the trusted inside man) is compromised when s/he embraces
this exaggerated sense of agency. The compromised effectiveness is a logical outcome of
the fact that the exaggerated sense of white agency is founded in oppressive structures.

The exaggerated white agency is sometimes expressed through a sense that one
can transcend all boundaries—that there are, indeed, no boundaries for the white body;
no space to which s/he is not entitled; and no reason why s/he should not be included at
any time, in any community, regardless of how it might be defined. Indeed, this tendency
is seen in the academy in much Critical Whiteness Studies work, which seems occupied
with expanding the available subject positions, legitimacy, and mobility of the white
body (see e.g., Gallagher, 2000; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 12; Newitz & Wray,
1997a, p. 5). Sharon tells us about one of her white colleagues with whom this was an
issue and who lacked the understanding of the limits of white agency and entitlement:

**Sharon:** Then she’d say, “Yeah, you know, but my [adopted] Aboriginal sister,
she went back to the reservation and we could never understand why she went
back to the reservation.” … But don’t you see, you always say “my Aboriginal
sister,” and not being able to understand the implications of those kinds of
descriptives, or not being able to understand why your sister who grew up in a
white family in small-town Canadian Province 3 might want to find an identity
elsewhere with people she considers to be part of her community. I mean, why
didn’t your family try to make those connections at a young age?

This excerpt describes the white colleague’s bewilderment that an Aboriginal child
adopted into her white family that had not made the required efforts to connect the child
to her Aboriginal identity might later choose to seek out those neglected aspects of her
identity by returning to a reservation. Debates about interracial adoption rage, but the
situation described here is not at all unusual (See e.g., P. Harris, 2006; Kaltenbaugh,
2007). However, what Sharon highlights here is her colleague’s failure to take seriously
the salience of racial identity. It is reasonable to suggest that much of the disconnect in
cases like these is related to the white adoptive family’s dismay that they, as caring
Whites giving an opportunity to disadvantaged nonwhite children, are not able to meet all their adoptive children’s needs for identity and belonging (see, e.g., Fran, 2008; Kaltenbaugh, 2007), and I argue that this flows from the exaggerated sense of white agency that is the subject of this section.

Where it comes to the context of racial equity work, Terrence and Keith suggest that white racial equity workers need to realize that there are some aspects of racial equity work that are best done and/or led by people of colour:

Terrence: He [Terrence’s white colleague] has an implicit understanding that things have to change. But for your change agent, you have to bring somebody who looks, feels like me [a Black person]. Otherwise you’ll never get the credibility, the passion, the drive to move the file.

Keith: That’s why I said to you that the white folks around here would not champion our cause. [They’ll give] strong support, financial and moral support to fight your cause, [but] you need to lead it.

By extension, these participants suggest that white racial equity workers need to understand the limits of their agency. As with the adoption scenario, they need to understand the areas in which they cannot substitute for the nonwhite body despite their good intentions. Where they do not have this understanding it becomes a barrier for racial equity work.

Sharon and Ajani extend this discussion to address the fact that there are moments in racial equity work where there need to be exclusively nonwhite spaces, and where the white presence is not helpful. Ajani explains:

Ajani: I would say for example, in my work I have certain projects that I do that need to be African descendants working on certain things. You know, it would be the same for a Native, if I have a friend who is Native and they’re doing their pow-wow, I’m not gonna muscle my way in there and say, “Well I should be—,” you know. When the time [comes] for us to meet up, knowing that we’re friends, [and] I know you’re doing something that’s for the betterment, we’ll meet up and further that. But at the same time we need to have our space to be able to—. You
know, for someone to say, “No! You shouldn’t have your own space to speak,” the analogy I give is, “If I wasn’t able to think, how could I communicate? Because I have to think in my mind first.” And the same thing goes for our people. We have to be able to think collectively and reason, and then we can bring something reasonable to the table. … I believe we can work together. Yes! But I would say if anyone could work together, it would be the Natives and Africans. So if there’s a need for them to have their space and for us to have our space and then come together, there is even a tenfold need when it comes to European descendants and African descendants. There is even more of a need that we need that space … So what I would say is, you know, the place for mutual work is very—, it needs to be calculated. And it needs to be understood that if there is no place for us to say we need space, then you’re probably not working with someone who is worthy of you working with in the first place.

Ajani speaks here about the importance for marginalized and minoritized groups in inequitable society to have spaces where they can think among themselves about strategies of resistance and focus on issues that are sidelined in a larger context. As Ajani explains, while there will always be a time and place for interracial collaboration, these nonwhite spaces are equally important because they create the room for nonwhite agency and the opportunity for Blacks to speak for themselves on their own terms. Sharon tells us more about this:

**Sharon:** And there are times when we need to decide that “Listen, this is not your space. It’s not your space to do the work here. It’s my space, and I need to take the lead on that.” So, I don’t think it’s about anybody can do this work at any time, at any place. … So (sigh), so no I don’t think that anybody can do the work. I think that those pieces have to be talked about and decided upon. And as a white person you need to understand where you shouldn’t be doing the work. … I think the people who are oppressed—I mean, I’m talking about Black people in this instance—need to be the ones that fashion the sorts of response. [If] there is a [Black] guy who gets shot [by police] in downtown {Major Canadian City 3}, the Black community needs to be the one to take the lead to say, “This is what, this is how we want this issue addressed.”

---

35 Hopefully it will not be necessary to explain why this is not some form of “reverse discrimination” or why these spaces are not equivalent to segregated white spaces. The differences, of course, are in terms of the group relationship to power.
Again, the emphasis here is upon the fact that oppressed communities need to be able to have their own voice and bring their own perspectives\(^{36}\) about what the responses to their oppression should look like. These can then be discussed in larger coalitions of interested parties and stakeholders. However, Ajani and Sharon are asserting that part of the understanding they require of white racial equity workers is that it is not appropriate for them to insist that they must be present “at any time, at any place.” Ajani goes on to say:

**Ajani:** So, it’s not as simple as self-definition, but self-definition is very important. I think self-definition can allow you at least to understand, to say can we work together. If someone [white] is self-defined as understanding their situation, they have common goals, you can say we can work together but that doesn’t mean that you don’t need your space from a cultural perspective to do your work.

Here Ajani points out, as part of a larger discussion on cultural appropriation, that part of white agency to (re)define oneself in opposition to dominant white identities and to commit to being involved in racial equity work should involve understanding the need for the oppressed to have their own space as necessary. An antiracist white identity, then, and the agency to create such an identity, also involves working within the limits of that agency.

Ultimately, the issue is that because of the symbiotic relationship between oppression and privilege, exaggerated white agency encroaches upon and negates Black (or nonwhite) agency. Sharon explains:

**Sharon:** If I’m gonna be blunt, white folks take up a lot of space in the world. That’s my issue. Ahm, and we’re not supposed to criticize that, because it sounds awful and it sounds ungrateful, right?

---

\(^{36}\) Note that there is no suggestion here that there is a single, monolithic perspective within the Black community or any other community.
Thus, in a broader discussion about Whites who are involved in international aid work, she says:

**Sharon**: I’m not even saying that they shouldn’t be doing what they’re doing. I’m saying that there’s a reason why they’re doing what they’re doing. There are systems that make that possible, and there are systems that suppress other voices around this, and we need to be aware. We need to talk about that, and we talk about that in a respectful way—in a way that doesn’t say, you know, “Don’t do this work,” but understand that! And if you understand how all of this is organized, can you then facilitate other African people to do the work so you don’t occupy that kind of space?

Sharon points out again that the sense of white agency to jump in and help is itself constructed upon inequitable arrangements that obscure one’s implication in the conditions they are working to alleviate and which position the white body as helper. However, these arrangements also deny agency to those who are simultaneously oppressed by existing inequitable arrangements and who are consequently positioned as being less able to help. Further, these same systems laud those Whites who help while failing to recognize and value the ongoing, daily resistance efforts of the oppressed. Sharon advocates for the kind of understanding in white racial equity workers that mitigates this exaggerated sense of white agency and appreciates the importance of acknowledging and supporting Black (or nonwhite) agency.

### 7.3 A Politics of Humility for Whites

The foregoing sections of this chapter have argued that the participants in this study want their white colleagues in racial equity work to have an “understanding,” but that this understanding is a call for a negation of the terms of the Racial Contract and the epistemology of ignorance it generates—what I have called an epistemology of
unknowing—rather than the superimposition of a particular new knowledge. Throughout, I have emphasized that the processes of unknowing and understanding are never complete because of how the white body is positioned to know within a white supremacist context. Thus, the salience of the body is always to be taken into account.

The epistemology of unknowing makes it impossible for Whites to claim that they “get it,” or for Blacks to classify them as “getting it,” in any finite, irrevocable way. These absolute terms do not take into account the incompleteness of white antiracism knowledge.

Within the context of racial equity collaborations, the salience of the body can be drawn through these epistemological processes of ignorance, unknowing and understanding to prescribe a politics of collaboration. Dei (2008b) comments that “salience is about preeminence, first entry point, and a situational politics,” pointing out that we can never lose sight of the salience of the body in terms of how it inserts the racial equity worker into the conditions of the racial equity work they endeavour to do, and how this work should be done. The salience of the body in terms of the type of knowledge it embodies prescribes different politics for different bodies—a politics of resistance for the Black body, and a politics of humility for the white body. The politics of resistance that the Black body might undertake is discussed in the next chapter, and the politics of humility that the study participants recommend for the white body is discussed in this section.

The ongoing epistemology of unknowing, and the always unfinishedness of the white antiracist identity call for a white politics of humility in doing racial equity work. This humility must be distinguished from the humility that is required of any racial equity
worker, regardless of her/his racial identification. All racial equity workers must realize that no individual or group of individuals can lay claim to incontestable social knowledge (see Dei, 2008c, p. 76), and realize that since racism plays out in context specific ways there are no meta-narratives for antiracism work. However, the white politics of humility goes further to outline the general implications for white engagement in racial equity work that flow from the particular forms of white embodied knowledge/ignorance and the contradictions of involving whiteness in racial equity work.

In a focus group session with Ajani and Sharon, both participants asserted that the white body is integral to racial equity work. The conversation therefore turned to discussing how this might be and what this might mean. In the following lengthy excerpt, Sharon eloquently describes the humility required of the white racial equity worker and the particular understanding she has of the white power that she would be willing to involve in racial equity work:

**Philip:** I realize different people may mean it different ways, but part of what I’ve heard [in my interviews] is that, “Hey, if we don’t get white power behind this struggle, it won’t happen. So, that’s one thing I’ve heard—that we need power to facilitate this change. The power is in the hands of Whites, and therefore we need to get them on board, because their power will facilitate this going on.” I’ve even heard someone say in one of my interviews for example, that it’s white men who decided that there was going to be employment equity in Canada, and so on and so forth, so they have been central to this whole process. Is that what you understand by integral when we say integral to antiracism work or racial equity work?

**Sharon:** No, because I don’t respect white power! I don’t value white power. I don’t think of it as legitimate. I mean it *exists*; I know what it is and how it operates. I know what I see when I turn on the television, but that’s not the kind of facilitation I’m talking about. What’s lacking in how you talked about white folks who are very arrogant politically is their lack of humility, their lack of understanding about where they fit into the scheme of things that then they now have the *right* to tell you about your reality. Ahm, so I’m looking for power in humility, and that’s how I see them as being integral. It’s not power in the way you exercise what you have on the basis of your privilege. I *reject* that. And we can’t have a conversation about that. So, when I think more carefully about the question
around how it’s integral, what’s missing is that humility around how you understand power and what power is. And I see it all the time, you know. I mean I can only speak from where I work and from my location and I see the arrogance in young white people when you talk about racism, and I look for the allies in the room who are white, because I need—, your body becomes a body on the line all the time, right? But I’m also looking for a humility in the way you exercise your support. That’s what I consider to be power. I mean implementing things like employment equity and affirmative action isn’t really it for me, because white folks always find a way to say—. It’s amazing, in every class that I’ve taught since I’ve been teaching, there’s at least one person in the class who knows of, or has had the experience of a white guy who got cheated out of a job because some less qualified African American woman got that job. So that’s the type of power that other folks might talk about, “Well they need to facilitate this because they have the power to implement that.” That’s not it for me, because they will always find a way to make themselves the victim at the end of the day.

Note Sharon’s references to Whites “tell[ing] you about your reality,” an indication of the need to unlearn white epistemic authority, and the tendency to un-self-consciously act on the basis of white privilege, an indication of the need to unlearn exaggerated white agency. In keeping with much that has been argued throughout this study, Sharon asserts that the exercise of this kind of power and privilege without the unknowing of white innocence and without an understanding of one’s implication in relations of race simply reinforces whiteness and brings about the contradictory outcomes we have discussed in Chapter 6. Whatever the ways that the white person engages in or supports racial equity work, it should not be through an arrogant “coming to the rescue,” but should be in ways that challenge the assumptions of white dominance and undermine the foundations of white racial privilege in the first place. The power of white bodies acting in ways that Sharon advocates does not come from their unearned privilege, but rather through their willingness as Whites to openly repudiate the terms of the racial status quo, which not only oppress Nonwhites but also privilege Whites—themselves included. This willingness to challenge the privileged grounds upon which they themselves stand as a
result of the understanding arrived at through the epistemology of unknowing constitutes the politics of humility that the participants seek in their white colleagues.

The politics of humility should also foster respect for Nonwhites and their own agency in struggling against oppression. As Ajani affirms in the same focus group session:

**Philip:** I think that the connection somehow that we’ve uncovered is that there is a connection between humility and what you’re able to know in the first place.

**Ajani:** Right! Because if you’re not humble, you’ll never really have those experiences and relationships develop with those people who are going through [oppression], especially those people who are putting the thought into the solutions in these situations.

Clearly, there is a dialogic relationship between the white politics of humility and the white “understanding” that the participants advocate. The white politics of humility promotes the development of white “understanding” which in turn endorses a politics of humility. The section that follows will outline some of the ethical/moral terms that the participants set for their racial equity alliances, the concrete responses to which might constitute a part of the white politics of humility.

### 7.4 Ethical/Moral Terms of Collaboration

I now turn to a discussion of other terms that the participants set for their collaboration with Whites in racial equity work. Essentially, these terms outline the kinds of things that the participants expect their white colleagues to do, and which they find particularly valuable and commendable within collaborative racial equity work. They are:

a) A sense of equality, fairness, and justice
b) Standing up, naming, and calling racism and
c) Taking risks and concretely undermining white privilege.

Together, these terms seem to outline the ethical/moral conditions that the participants in this study hope to have in place when they collaborate with Whites in Racial equity work. These categories correspond and respond to the categories we saw in Chapter 6 that represent some of the contradictions that can arise in racial equity collaborations across lines of racial privilege. Thus, the *Sense of Equality, Justice and Fairness* is the term of collaboration that corresponds to the missionary approach; *Standing Up, Naming and Calling Racism* is the term of collaboration that heads off the patterns of avoidance and failing to stand up for racial equity; and *Taking Risks and Concretely Undermining White Privilege* is the term of collaboration that heads off cultural appropriation and Whites unilaterally benefitting from racial equity work.

It is important to note that these proposed strategies only partially address the contradictions raised in Chapter 6 since the contradictions are largely structurally determined and operate despite the individual politics of the white racial equity worker. Thus, in the case of each of the contradictions mentioned above, there were deeper dimensions discussed in Chapter 6 that cannot be completely addressed by the strategies that follow. However, the strategies that follow, when used by the white racial equity worker, represent a level of “understanding,” a politics of humility, and, more importantly, a personal commitment on the part of the white racial equity worker to act against the contradictions which result from the ways their bodies position them within racial equity work and the social landscape at large.
7.4.1 The Sense of Equality

The first of these terms that we will investigate is the positive counterpart for the inequitable terms of relationship discussed in Section 6.2. The participants in this study look for a sense of equality in their colleagues. They express this in various ways. When asked what advice she has for white racial equity workers, Diane says:

Diane: … my advice would be that we are equal to begin with—in terms of our humanity, OK? So if you think you’re superior to me, we need to think—, you need to fix that right now!

Later she gives similar advice to Blacks who work with Whites in racial equity work:

Diane: … there has to be, I think, a sense that you are equal partners in whatever project you’re working on. … So to me those are all things that have to be—, I mean if you were looking at the optimal, that’s what you would want to have as a Black person engaging in work with white people who want to do this kinda work.

Thus, Diane insists that the terms of the collaboration relationship be based upon a fundamental sense of equity. She does not want her white colleagues to feel they are superior to her, and she advises Black racial equity workers to insist on being equal partners in the work.

Beverly has the same advice for the Black individuals in racial equity collaborations with Whites. She says:

Beverly: My advice to that person is to make sure that you be full partners. Because I find that in many instances where a white person comes in, that there is the—, there is that possibility of that white person stepping ahead, overshadowing the Black person. … So you have to be, ahm, I think the caution would be that you be co-partners.

Like Diane, Beverly requires that it is perfectly clear that the Whites and Blacks collaborating in the racial equity work are on equal terms, and that there be no presumption of authority over the Black person. From this excerpt, we also see how this
sense of equality is founded upon the unknowing of epistemic authority, which is one of the epistemological terms the participants set for their white colleagues. There must be a fundamental sense of equal humanity in the collaborative relationship.

It may seem strange that in the context of racial equity work, the participants should have to look for this sense of equity and cannot, rather, assume it, but we have discussed in Section 5.2 the many ways in which racial equity work can be used by Whites to come to know themselves as a particular type of superior white subject. The participants therefore insist that these hierarchical ontologies not intrude into racial equity work, and try to make sure that the sense of equality is in place in their relationships with their white colleagues.

Beverly, in particular, is very sensitive to how inequitable understandings of the collaborative relationship may be manifest in racial equity collaborations. We recall (from Section 6.2.1) that she finds it problematic when her white colleagues do not allow her to reciprocate even small acts of kindness. Here, I present yet another situation that indicates to her that the basic sense of equity is not present:

**Beverly:** I’ll tell you where I notice, ahm, differences. I find that if you go into a, let’s say a function, a gathering, you find that if that person is not able to come up and greet you before his or her cultural group, then for me a red flag its going up there, you know? A red flag is going up there and saying, “Is it that that person cannot afford to be seen with me in a social setting?” That’s one of the things that is very interesting. Because I find that as a Black person, you will go into a setting and very few Whites will come up to you and greet you and say “Hi” and the rest of it, as long as you’re in a predominantly white setting.

According to Beverly and the other participants, these are the types of contradictions that they grapple with in their collaborative relationships in racial equity work.

What then might the sense of equality actually look like in practice? Section 7.4.3 presents the ways in which Whites can concretely undermine their white privilege.
However, Terrence shares several incidents that illustrate practical operationalization of this sense of equality:

Terrence: I was talking to Julian Howe, who was at a very high level in this organization, and my time was running short and I had to go and catch a plane. So I apologized to him, and I said, “I didn’t know we were going to speak that long, but I have a plane to catch.”
And he says, “Well, are you driving?”
And I said, “No.”
And he said, “Well wait a minute.” He called someone and then he said, “Follow me.” He went down the elevator shaft with me, then down the stairs, through the garage to put me in a car to take me to the airport. Now that may seem like nothing, but in my working life, I don’t know any person of that rank who would have taken the time for a Black man to walk them almost half-a-mile under a parking garage to make sure that I wasn’t lost, and I knew exactly where I was going. I know a white man who would call his secretary, or I know a white man who would give me the directions where to go. I don’t know a white man who would take time to walk me to put me where I’m supposed to go—at that level. {Actual job titles have been avoided to protect anonymity}

Terrence is impressed with this individual who he feels went beyond the call of duty to make sure he was well taken care of. He also finds impressive that though he had the authority to do so, this man did not commit the carrying out of this courtesy to his subordinates. Instead, he personally saw to Terrence’s comfort. Terrence relates another incident:

Terrence: So my first week I’m transiting through the lobby, then I hear quick footsteps behind me. Knowing that I don’t owe anybody money, I didn’t bother to turn around to see who it was. Turns out it is Dean Kerry [president of the company] hastening his pace to come and tap me on the shoulder to say, “How are you doing.” … I’ve worked with Whites all my life in executive positions. I have never met a white man who would be willing to see me and run after me to come and say “Hi.” As a matter of fact, with colleagues in my previous job, we would walk past each other and barely acknowledge each other. At best could be a hand wave, but nothing too demonstrative.

Once again, a high ranking white colleague, without contrivance, foregoes what seem to be the norms and mores that implicitly govern hierarchical working relationships.
Instead, he chooses to be personable and relate on equal and equitable terms with a Black junior colleague at the company.

Terrence provides a final example that he feels especially demonstrates the sense of equity. He relates:

Terrence: Now I have to give you one more personal example, because that one shocked the core out of me. I may have been one of the few people in my position who addressed the Board of Directors, because usually it’s reserved for higher level officials. So, I was called to talk to the Board of Directors. My presentation was, let’s say, at 3:30. They were running late because they were presenting financials, and then they took a break, and they walked out. I was sitting with other higher level officials, and we were all talking. After the break, all of those people were called into the room. Technically speaking, I was going to sit there by myself. Dean Kerry came to me, put his hand on my shoulders and says, “You’re not gonna sit here by yourself? Come in. Whatever you’re gonna hear, just promise you’re never gonna repeat it. But come in and listen to us.” Those things at that level by individuals are not done. I beg you to believe me.

{Actual job titles have been avoided to protect anonymity}

What seems to impress Terrence here is this individual’s willingness to break with hierarchical arrangements. Where, in this instance, he had every reason, based on job title and protocols in the organization, to pull rank and exclude on that basis, this colleague chose to trust Terrence’s integrity and sidestep those arrangements. Terrence is not unaware of the need for different levels of authority within an organization, but these three excerpts seem to suggest that he values when white colleagues seize opportunities to relate outside of these hierarchies where possible, when others in the same situation routinely use those occasions to flout their power and authority. He believes this grows out of a basic recognition of human equality despite job titles and responsibilities, though he is unsure whether these Whites are actively seeking opportunities to act upon a commitment to this equality or whether they have simply integrated it into the way they relate:
Terrence: I have to believe that amongst this group of white men, they have a sense of fairness, of understanding. Maybe they’re fighting themselves and they’re saying, “OK. We need to reach out in a different way.” I cannot pinpoint it. And I think what is amazing to me, Philip, I would say to you, they probably don’t even know that they did that. It wasn’t something that was forced. I would have known it.

While with respect to work situations, hierarchies may be necessary, the hierarchies should not be extrapolated beyond those working roles and used as excuses to justify “Big I-Little You” behaviour. Workplace hierarchies ought not to eclipse the basic sense of equality that places all humans on level ground. There is certainly no room for this behaviour in racial equity collaborations. The participants here set the sense of equality as a term and moral foundation for collaborative relationships in order to challenge the socially sanctioned racial hierarchies that may not only influence racial equity work, but can also be secured and bolstered through that work.

7.4.2 Standing Up, Naming, and Calling Racism

The next of these terms is the antidote for the patterns of stalling, avoidance and failing to stand up for racial equity discussed in Section 6.3. We saw there how the participants felt that, paradoxically, some of their white colleagues in racial equity work do not in fact, challenge racism in crucial moments, or avoid naming it, as Diane expresses in the somewhat cynical statement:

Diane: As you know, when you have white people on a committee or a research project, they don’t like to use the word racism.

These failures most often arose where challenging racism would entail taking risks and potentially offending other Whites. We have already seen that the participants disdain this soft-pedaling, lack of courage, and unwillingness to face the hard issues head-on. As
a result, the participants in this study insist that their white colleagues be prepared to
publicly take a stand against racism by naming it where they identify it and then taking
necessary action to challenge it. They value and respect their white colleagues who, in
support of the racial equity cause, and in solidarity with their Black colleagues, are
willing to stand up before other Whites and point out racism that the other Whites may
not be seeing or may be denying, without capitulating or being shaken from the critical
point of view. Diane commends white colleagues who do so:

**Diane:** I know people who are working against racism as a white person who is
standing up and actually naming it in white institutions or in other contexts. And
I do know people who are effective at doing that in the sense that they will take
the risk, they will stand up and say to their white counterparts, “Wait a minute.
The way you’re treating this Asian person, or the way you’re treating the
Aboriginal person or this Black person is racist, whether you recognize it or not.
And it’s racist because—.” OK? So, I know people who do that. And I think
that there are some people that I know who are effective at doing that.

In this and other excerpts, there is an emphasis on the idea of “standing up.” In a political
context where it is often difficult to come by an admission of racism because of colour-
blindness and epistemologies of ignorance, this “standing up” suggests being willing to
be counted as one who recognizes the reality of racism and the severity of the
consequences; one who admits that there are, indeed, structural inequities that must
urgently be addressed.

Like Diane, Beverly also values colleagues who can recognize inequity when it is
happening, and stand up for racial justice. In this particular instance she speaks
specifically about recognizing the systematic marginalization and disenfranchisement of
Black students in the education system:

**Beverly:** And is that person willing to share their findings? You know, when I
have a vice-principal who is willing to stand up and say, “Yes. Many of the Black
kids are, yes, in college level courses, are in special education,” then that vice-
principal is reaching out and taking the risk and is prepared to stand up and back up what he or she is saying.

While Nonwhites must fight racism on their own terms, and need not seek validation of the reality of their struggle from Whites (Dei et al., 2004, pp. 8-9), it is hard to miss the emphasis upon concurrence in Beverly’s excerpt above. The repeated “yes” gives the sense that this standing up also represents a “coming to see with” and therefore a “speaking with” Blacks. As with Diane, part of what Beverly values is the white colleague’s refusal to be seduced by the pervasive atmosphere of denial or to participate in perpetuating it. The emphasis here is not on white validation of what Blacks know, but rather upon responding with them to the moral imperative to “stand up” and challenge racial injustice even when it is not popular to do so.

Quentin explains that this “standing up” is often left to Blacks (or Nonwhites) to do, and Quentin objects:

**Quentin:** And something that always bothers me is that when it comes to racism, whether it be in a work setting or a school, no matter where it was, when something always happened or came up, the expectation was by the audience or by the participants, or by those that were interacting, that it should be me that should be speaking up. Because it’s not uncommon to be caught in the situation where you’re the only one in a group. I often say to people, you know, “It’s not my responsibility, but it’s everybody’s responsibility! So why does the onus always—, why do you put the onus on me? So, you’re as disenchanted or discouraged or insulted—whatever the case may be—by the remarks that you’ve heard or the actions of someone else, you’ve got a responsibility to speak up.” Yeah, so that’s always bothered me. And again, it puts pressure on those of us of African descent who have the balls and the courage, because it does take balls and courage to speak up, again because you’re in the minority. Again, and again, you’re setting yourself up, and you also know that not to do it is a failure within yourself.

Here, Quentin argues that Whites should take the initiative to speak up when there is a racist incident or when there is a racially inequitable social arrangement that needs to be challenged. As he presents it, this is a moral imperative. To speak up under these
conditions is to stand for what is just and equitable, which one might assume that all fair-minded individuals should want to do. It is also to cast one’s lot with the cause of racial justice in a climate where so many are drawn into complicity with racial injustice and inequity through silence or fear of reprisal.

Quentin also opines that Whites who speak up under these conditions play a role in relieving some of the pressure to do so from the victims of racial oppression. He communicates the moral obligation that he feels to speak up under these circumstances, even if it will expose him to negative consequences. Many of the other participants communicate the same feelings of obligation in the face of opposition:

**Diane:** If you give thought to the consequences, you’ll be quite often stymied in doing the work. The consequences could be dire for some people. So there is a scholar, for example, who has written a book on the whole subject about “Why I do this work,” who basically said as a Black person you do it because it’s the right thing to do, because it is part of your nature to do it as a Black person.

This statement that could seem essentialist simply refers to the sense of calling that Diane and other Black racial equity workers feel to their work. They cannot easily stop doing the work despite the repercussions against them for doing it—whether financial, upon their careers, or just with regard to the constant, wearying demand for their participation. Imani expresses this powerfully in the following excerpt:

**Imani:** I have people calling me and saying “How did you get into [racial equity work]?”

And I keep thinking, “Am I in it? Yes, I guess I’m in it.” There was a need. There was a need to speak out about things that are unfair, that are inappropriate; behaviours that don’t coincide with the constitution, which don’t coincide with our rights as workers, our rights as people, as citizens. There’s a need to call it and say *{laughing matter-of-factly}* “This isn’t right!” And to not only say that it’s wrong, but also to say how it might be corrected, and then to rail when it isn’t corrected, and to identify those people who stand and block its correction. There’s a need to do that! I wish there weren’t, you know, because there are so many other things *{laughs}* I would like to do, you know, but it keeps coming up and it never stops. And there are new faces, and there are new mouths
to say it, and there are additional institutions with which I become involved, and there are new phases, and there is new terminology—they’re always changing the terminology to protect the guilty, I think—but it’s all the same thing. And so you begin to speak out, and then people come to you and ask you to be a part of groups that also speak out, and so you find yourself in associations that focus on similar issues. And, you know, you all of a sudden are seen as an equity worker, though it was never a job that you applied for, a title that you aspired to, a role that you in any kind of deliberate way sought to achieve. It just happened out of a sense of—, out of the demand for your rights and a demand for your dignity, and out of a sense of outrage that there are institutions and processes and people who oppose it. That’s how you end up here. And every time you say, “Well I mean there’ll be spring every year without me. I think I’ll go off somewhere and do those things I wanna do,” you get called to yet another committee. And you can say no to the committee, but it’s the issues that you can’t say no to.

Clearly, Imani, like the others, also experiences a sense of calling to do equity work that does not allow her to sit by when there is injustice to be challenged. She must “stand up”! Apparently, by asking their white colleagues to “stand up,” these Black racial equity workers are simply asking that their white colleagues embrace the same sense of ethical commitment that they themselves have to racial equity work, along with the attendant risks.

This solidarity and commitment to naming and calling racism is of particular importance within the settings that they do the work—where differently raced bodies are received differently (as discussed in Section 5.6.2). Sharon tells us that she needs to have assurance of her white colleague’s commitment to “stand up” in those moments where it is not only racism in the larger societal context that needs to be challenged, but also the racial dynamic within the setting of racial equity workshops:

Sharon: And I need to know that you’re gonna have my back when we do workshops together; when we collaborate on these sorts of—. That when you see racism happening to me in those situations that you’re prepared to name it and call it at the time when I need you to say that. You know, I mean you should say that. I don’t want you to kind of back out … I need you to step up at that time. So I need to have that kind of confidence in who I work with or who I do this kind of work with.
As a term of collaborating with white colleagues in racial equity work, Sharon asserts that they should be prepared to name racism, particularly when it is occurring as white backlash toward the Black colleague. This term that Sharon sets is the opposite of that which was in operation in the situation that Imani described where her white colleague had the tendency of “pulling out; leaving you there to take the heat” (see Section 6.3.1). The type of commitment that the Black racial equity workers expect is therefore demonstrated when the white racial equity worker is able to overcome personal discomfort in order to challenge racism. Diane concurs:

**Diane**: Well, I suppose the quality that makes that effective is simply a social one in the sense that these are people who are willing to step outside the status quo, the comfortable niche that they’re in as white people. And that’s what makes it effective, because they are saying to other white people, “I see it for this.” It’s not just a question,”—although I think our opinion is quite valid on these issues—“it’s not just, though, that we [Blacks] are saying that you as white people are oppressing others. I’m telling you as a white person that you are oppressing others in the circumstances, and this is why I believe that.” I think that’s very effective … saying that, “I recognize it. If I recognize it, you should be able to, and if you don’t I’m going to tell you why what you’re doing leads to the oppression of other people.” And I think that that’s an effective thing to happen.

In addition to overcoming personal discomfort, it seems apparent from the participant narratives that “standing up, naming and calling” racism for the white colleague also involves an element of creating a level of discomfort among complacent Whites, which will challenge their normalized white privilege. Again, this is something that the Black racial equity workers do themselves. In a discussion about the fact that racial equity messages are received differently from differently raced bodies, Imani shares:

**Imani**: Well I didn’t say the message was *best* received by the—. I figure it may be more easily received by some from a white person. That doesn’t mean to say that I’d do it. You know, there’s that old saying that the truth will make you free,
but first it will make you uncomfortable. And people say, “Well, you have to make people comfortable or they don’t wanna hear you.” And I make them comfortable at the beginning and then I “zam!”, you know. You know, what the hell’s the use of going—? I mean I’ve been to workshops where they reaffirmed everything I ever did, and you think, “Well why did I go there? … And so, you know, don’t assume that when I say it’s more easily—, it’s sometimes more easily received by Whites when Whites present that I think therefore it should be done. … If I’m given the job to do, I do it.

Imani argues for the importance of creating enough discomfort within a white audience during her racial equity workshops to unsettle the complacency and ignorance that allow racial inequity to continue. She feels that if she does not create this discomfort, her intervention will be futile. Therefore, while Imani is willing to take into consideration how the racial equity message may be received by different bodies, she is unwilling to make this a reason to hand over her responsibility to challenge racism or her opportunity to lead a workshop. It would seem obvious, then, that Imani might expect white racial equity workers not to allow their racial equity work to be limited by the discomfort of white audiences.

Quentin is of the very same mind, also speaking about the importance of discomfort in fostering antiracist growth. Witness this in our conversation about ineffective white racial equity work:

**Philip:** Could you describe a person who was supposed to be an ally in fighting racism, a white person, but was a very poor ally. And what do you think made that person a poor ally in this case?

**Quentin:** Ah, yes. There was a person who I’d learned about. He was going around doing what he called sensitivity training in the corporate community. I got to know this person. I went to one of his sessions. And what he did is it was full of humour so people laughed. There was lots of humour, and there wasn’t that self-reflection. So the audience seen this person to be very entertaining, which he was, but when they left the session, at the end of the day, the comments that I was hearing weren’t the healthy kind, because the comments that I was hearing: “Aw, gee. That was fun!” And this stuff shouldn’t be fun, because it’s not fun to make
people look at ways that they, and sometimes unintentionally, contribute to some of the problems that face us in our society today. That’s not fun! So when people are leaving and say, “Oh Gee that was fun” or patting themselves on the back, then my buddy, you’ve missed the mark. He was missing the mark way big time.

**Philip:** People, you’re thinking, should come out of those sessions feeling disturbed, feeling motivated to make a change?

**Quentin:** Yeah. They should come out of those sessions, “Wow! You know what? There’s some things that they talked about today that I do, and I didn’t think about it at the time, but, d’you know what? I think I contribute to some of the problems that we face in society today.” So I’m leaving this workshop, and I’m unthinking, and I’m thinking what am I gonna do differently tomorrow than what I did today or the day before or whatever? What am I gonna do different to make me a great person which is gonna make society better off? And not only that but, the light bulb should keep coming on because it’s a lifelong learning experience.

Notice Quentin’s references to “unthinking,” and the ongoing nature of this process. This fits perfectly with the epistemology of unknowing described earlier in this chapter. However, one of the main points that Quentin makes in this excerpt concerns the power of creating discomfort with respect to inspiring antiracist growth. He is, therefore, quite annoyed with the white racial equity worker who structures his workshops around making his white audience comfortable through humour, which seems to make light of racism. In Quentin’s opinion, this short-circuits the antiracist growth that ought to be the outcome of such workshops.

In contrast, Imani tells us about white racial equity workers who are effective at creating the kind of white discomfort that promotes progress toward an antiracist identity:

**Philip:** Could you describe a white person you’ve worked with in fighting racism who you thought was effective? And could you tell me what it was that made them effective?

**Imani:** Well first of all, they knew what they were about. They weren’t apologizing. They weren’t using it as a substitute for missionary work. (Some of them do, you know. They don’t understand. And it isn’t that they intend to be ill-intentioned.) But they knew that it was racism that we were focusing on. They
knew what it looked like. They knew what it *sounded* like. I didn’t have to say, “Well did you hear that?” They heard it! They understood it. And they had one advantage that you haven’t asked me about. Just as we can empathize with those people who are suffering the impositions of race, they could empathize—even though they hate it being called that—with those people who were demonstrating racism—especially those who were demonstrating racism unintentionally. (Those are the ones who knock off your socks, you know, because they think they’re not.) And because they could empathize with them—I don’t mean accept it, but empathize—they knew where the nerve was, and they could prep it in this very—; and make them uncomfortable enough to get out of that route where they had been for a long time and move on. And, ah, that was *extremely* valuable.

This excerpt picks up themes we have discussed above, and shows the importance for the white racial equity worker to have the critical apparatus to recognize racism when s/he encounters it and to resist the seduction of dominant justifications that explain away racism. However, Imani also discusses the fact that these Whites may be located in particular ways to create the kind of discomfort among other Whites that will provoke the reflection about which Quentin speaks. Again, to be consistent with earlier discussions, it is important to note that this “insider” knowledge need not be understood as white authority that trumps Black knowledge about how to go about racial equity work. Ironically, very often dominant bodies parlay this purported “insider” status to this end (see Andersen, 2003, p. 32). In an ensuing discussion about this possibility, and in response to an incident where a nonwhite racial equity worker suggests deferring to a white, male, heterosexual, non-disabled male because of his “expert knowledge” of dominance, Imani makes it clear this is not what she has in mind:

**Imani:** And I would have turned to her and said, “I suggest we say what we think is best since we have the knowledge and the authority.” And that would have cut it right there. And I would have asked her, “Are you wanting to play this workshop so that they will be happy with us, or are you wanting to play this thing so that they will learn from the uncomfortable part?
Clearly, Imani recognizes the epistemic and political salience of the Black body in racial equity work, and that because of the operation of epistemologies of ignorance, “insider” status in whiteness is unlikely to confer “expert” status. We can also infer that she is suggesting that where the “insider” knowledge of being white is used to trump rather than complement Black knowledge, it is often to justify soft-stepping rather than the “standing up” that we are discussing here. She rejects the positioning of social dominance to claim expert knowledge in equity work, and prefers the kind of mutually complementary collaborative work between white and Black bodies that will provoke discomfort and movement toward an antiracist identity.

Sharon adds to this discussion by commending one of her white colleagues’ ability to provoke reflection and thought through skillful questioning that also creates discomfort and dissonance.

Sharon: I remember she was telling me one time that she went to Canadian Province 2. Her partner’s family is from Canadian Province 2 and they’ve had land in Canadian Province 2 for years, for generations. And she went to Canadian Province 2 and her boyfriend’s mom pulled out an old, old map of what the area was like in the 1800s, and, like, identified where their land would be on the map. And she said to her mother-in-law, “Oh. So what’s the history behind how you got this land?”

And her mother-in-law was, like, really surprised. She said, “Oh, well what do you mean?”

She said, “Well who had the land before you acquired the land?” And of course, the conversation in the room went dead, because the family had never, ever—. It never occurred to them that maybe there were other people; they were sitting on other people’s land. … But she would ask those kinds of questions that you would never expect people to ask. Like, “OK so why,” you know, “so there’s this map. Like, where did you get this land? Did you ever think that maybe dot, dot, dot?” So she had this uncanny ability to ask that question, to ask that discomfiting question that makes people go, “Hmm.”

It is important to notice that this conversation is happening in an all-white context. So Sharon is not only pleased with her colleague’s ability to create the kind of discomfort
that will foster contemplation, but also with her commitment to racial equity as demonstrated in her willingness to do this in all-white context where normalized white privilege would not otherwise be recognized or challenged. This is part of the role that Sharon sees for white racial equity workers as discussed in Section 5.5—that is, in giving racial equity work access to all-white spaces. The commitment to racial equity work demonstrated in these spaces will spill over into spaces of collaboration. Sharon finds that her colleague also has this approach in the workshops they do together. She says:

Sharon: It’s that willingness to really challenge white people who did the workshop. She is fierce. She is absolutely fierce! And I really like her for that. And if there are things that she does that I think are a little bit off, she’s willing to hear that, you know?

I do not feel that by using the word “fierce” Sharon is advocating crassness or rudeness. However it does seem that, along with the other participants mentioned in this section, she highly values the kind of commitment to racial equity work that will cause the white racial equity worker to “stand up, name, and call” racism, as necessary, rather than ignore it or capitulate to the comfort of those Whites whose attitudes, ideologies, and practices need to be challenged. Again, she also values that this kind of skillful white racial equity work nevertheless operates in the kind of humility that will recognize and take seriously the salience of the Black voice.

7.4.3 Taking Risks and Concretely Undermining White Privilege

In the previous section, I argued that the participants saw themselves as “standing up” as a matter of regular fare in their racial equity work, and that they therefore also required their white colleagues to “stand up” as a matter of moral commitment.
However, several of the excerpts in the previous section and the discussion of discomfort suggest that “standing up, naming, and calling” racism involves considerable risk for the Black racial equity worker. Thus, by extension, we would expect that the “standing up” required of the white racial equity worker may not only imply overcoming personal discomfort, but also, like their Black colleagues, being committed enough to assume the real risks that arise from “standing up.” In discussing the place of differently raced bodies in antiracist work, Dei (2008c) says:

… for me, the fundamental question is not really to ask: Who can do anti-racist work? Rather it is to inquire if we are all prepared to take risks, engage in contestation, and face the consequences that come with doing anti-racist work. (p. 69)

This section will argue that in addition to expecting their white colleagues to “stand up,” the participants also have the overlapping expectation, in agreement with Dei, that their white colleagues be willing to assume the risks of doing racial equity work. It is not always the case that white racial equity workers will be willing to assume such risks. For example, Imani says:

**Imani:** Then there are those [Whites] who see [your claims of racism] and who agree with you. I mean, they exist also. Whether or not they are willing to put themselves on the line to make change, I don’t know. Sometimes it depends on how serious they are about it, or how uncomfortable they’re willing to make themselves.

Clearly, then, being a white racial equity worker, and even being aware of racial inequity, does not guarantee that an individual will be willing to take those risks inherent in promoting racial equity. However, this excerpt establishes the link the participants see between the serious commitment to making antiracist change and being willing to take risks.
One type of risk that the white racial equity worker may take involves taking racially progressive stands within a climate that resists it. James describes one such instance:

James: Our boss called me one day—this is the guy who hired me—called me one day: “One of our managers has retired, so we’re looking for a replacement for this person.” And the outgoing manager is a white female. So the boss called me and he said “Well James, you know, we are looking for a new manager.”

I said, “Yeah, I know. So what are we gonna do?”

So he says, “Well, you know any one in the visible minority community that we can hire to bring in here without a competitive process?”

I said, “Really?” So I looked at him and said, “Well why do you wanna do that?”

He said, “Well, we’ve been so impressed with you, and I think we have to get to the point where we need a spokesman for the organization to be a visible minority.”

I said, “Really?” And that impressed me. So, I went out and I started searching for somebody, and we are still going through the process. To me that was very positive. It’s not everyday that you run into anyone who is willing to stick out their neck like that for our people.

Philip: ’Cause that was what I was gonna ask you. What aspect of it was impressive? That he stuck out his neck?

James: Because he’s gonna get a lot of flack. Oh yes!

Philip: He is going to get a lot of flack? Not only if it’s discovered that he had this conversation? He’s just going to get a lot of flack, period?

James: He’s going to get a lot of flack if they hire the person, the same way that he got a lot of flack when they hired me.

Here, James’s white colleague sought to use an employment equity strategy that would place a person of Colour into a leadership position within a department whose raison d’être is racial equity work, and within which there were almost no nonwhite employees. This suggests that the colleague understood the value of nonwhite knowledge in racial equity work as well as the inherent biases in many ostensibly neutral hiring processes.
It is important to note here that in addition to the inequitable, ostensibly neutral hiring processes that favour Whites, hiring processes are also routinely circumvented—often to hire acquaintances or those whom colleagues have recommended. Since in Canada those in positions of power to hire are most often Whites with largely white circles of acquaintance, this process further contributes to the under-representation of Blacks with respect to hiring and promotion. Even the federal government with its employment equity standards allows managers to not hire the best qualified in order to hire the person with the right “fit.” It should not be difficult for the reader to see that “fit” can easily become a racialized (and otherwise inequitable) concept, and Nonwhites have often been passed over through policies like these (see Golden, 2004; Public Service Commission of Canada, 2007). James’s colleague’s strategy is therefore a proactive attempt to make the work force representative and to make sure that crucial knowledge for the success of the department is represented on the team. This individual was willing to take the risk to circumvent the “neutral” processes that had thus far resulted in an all-white staff (except for James who had recently been hired by the same white colleague).

In this instance, James relates that the risk is related not only to the fact that an employment equity strategy was used, but also simply to how hiring a person of Colour would be perceived. There had already been repercussions when James had been hired though he was hired using the competitive process in place, and this only draws further attention to the racist assumptions that operate in these circumstances which suggest that if merit is the criterion, Whites will always be the best qualified. Based on these assumptions and the ingrained white privilege in these contexts, when a white individual takes this kind of step, s/he runs the risk of having to justify her/his hiring decisions, and
the risk of being seen as biased. These judgments could have negative repercussions for
the white racial equity worker.

Though in a different climate, or in one that eventually becomes more racially
progressive, this white worker may be read as selfless and courageous in ways that Black
racial equity workers are seldom read (see discussions in Sections 5.6.2 and 6.4.2), these
risks are, nevertheless, very real where white privilege and power are entrenched. Diane
also comments on the risks inherent in standing against racism:

**Diane:** I know people who are working against racism as a white person who is
standing up and actually naming it in white institutions or in other contexts … I
think that there are some people that I know who are effective at doing that.
There is risk, and they take the risk. The risk is that they are ostracized by their
co-workers, or white counterparts or whatever. So, you know, they’re labeled as
race traitors. So some of the white privilege that they have been accustomed to
gets taken away.

Here, the risk for the white person of doing serious racial equity work is that they may
lose status as signatories to the Racial Contract in a society where racial oppression is
normalized. Many Whites would prefer to actively perpetuate racial oppression. Many
more prefer to passively reap the benefits of white-skin privilege in a racist society
without being made to think about the injustice involved, and will shun those Whites who
point out racism where they see it. Other Whites may no longer see them as “insiders” in
all-white contexts where racial injustice is trivialized and where insincere “politically
correct” behaviour may be suspended.

However, I think it is important to point out here that the loss of white privilege
that Diane speaks of is very specific and is certainly not absolute. I have consistently
argued throughout this work that white privilege adheres to the white body regardless of
one’s personal politics. Thus, the privilege that Whites have with respect to Nonwhites in
terms of receiving preferential treatment or avoiding negative treatment (for example, with regard to hiring, treatment by the justice system, preference in financial and housing markets, etc.) does not disappear when one decides to adopt an antiracist politics. Indeed, these benefits are awarded so routinely and without fanfare that unless there is a nonwhite person present at the same time who is being treated differently, it is impossible for the white person even to object to receiving the benefits of white privilege. The loss of white privilege spoken of above, then, refers specifically to the loss of “insider” status within social networks where epistemologies of ignorance and the terms of the Racial Contract are the unchallenged norm. The Black racial equity workers value the kind of risk-taking that signals the white colleague’s dissent from the terms of the Racial Contract.

Where the white racial equity worker is, in fact, aware of differential treatment, the Black racial equity workers expect that their risk-taking will extend into the practical undermining of this white privilege where possible. Sharon relates such an incident where she and her white colleague were being paid differently for the similar racial equity work they were doing within a community organization:

**Sharon:** I was being paid less money than her (because she did get more hours and she was responsible for some other things) and she said—and I did not know about this—but she went to the board and she said, “Listen, Sharon and I do about the same kind of work, put in the same kind of hours, and we know that you guys don’t have money to pay us an equal amount, but I’m prepared to take a cut so we can equalize the payment.” So I thought that was a really strong commitment of what equity meant—like giving up something. And you don’t see that very often. And not like it was a lot of money, but the fact that she went ahead and did that! So when I got my next pay cheque, it was more! And I was like, “Did I get a raise?” And then they told me. … I really liked working with her because she was always prepared to give up something; to say, “OK, I understand the privilege and power I have as a white woman and because I know how that works, here’s what I’m prepared to do. And it wasn’t done in a patronizing way. It wasn’t done in a, “Oh, poor you” you know “I have power so I am prepared to share it with you.” It was never done like that. She would just do it, and you wouldn’t even know that she did it until later on, or afterward it would occur to
me, “Oh, OK.” So, I really liked that about her, and today she is one of my dearest friends.

This is a particularly powerful example of a white colleague feeling strongly enough about racial justice that she was prepared to relinquish the material benefits of her white privilege (though in this case it turned out that the organization raised the Black worker’s pay rather than reduce the white worker’s). However, this is the risk-taking and undermining of white privilege through concrete action that the participants in this study highly value.

I also draw attention to the modest manner in which Sharon’s colleague undertook this action. Sharon and other Black racial equity workers in this study value when these risks are not taken out of self-interest, and when those taking the risk do not then boast about their progressive stances. In this vein, referring to a white colleague who was the only one to support her when she was being mistreated at work, Maryam says:

**Maryam:** And most of the time, what I have found is this kind of white people, they are risk-takers, because they don’t know you. They know that you come from elsewhere, or that you come—. And for them, they don’t take risk saying, {in dramatic voice} “Oh, I’m taking the risk.” It’s a second nature in them, you see?

In a similar context, Terrence says:

**Terrence:** And I think what is amazing to me, Philip, I would say to you, they probably don’t even know that they did that. It wasn’t something that was forced. I would have known it. It was quite natural for them to do that.

These excerpts seem to suggest that the white racial equity worker’s risk-taking counts most when it is not enacted as a self-interested, credentializing or identity-making performance designed to prove to oneself or to others that s/he has “arrived” as an antiracist. It is simply a matter of doing the right thing in terms of acting against racial inequity. Indeed, it is the fact that they don’t see their behaviour as doing more than what
would be expected in the name of fairness and justice, and the fact that they don’t expect accolades that seems to cause their Black colleagues to most respect and value their risk-taking.

Therefore, I would disagree with Maryam’s and Terrence’s attribution of this behavior to second nature. The ways that the white racial equity workers’ bodies position them within the epistemological climate of a racially inequitable society in which these acts occur would prompt them to understand their acts as benevolence and largesse worthy of recognition. That they take the unassuming approaches that they do suggests that the individuals in question are doing the necessary work of unknowing. If this work is appropriately done according to the discussions earlier in this chapter, then they will be aware of the ongoing nature of this unlearning and will not proffer individual or isolated performances as markers of their having “become antiracist” in any already complete way. Indeed, any attempt to do otherwise would actually undermine their claims to have escaped the epistemology of ignorance and the habit of whiteness. It is very poignant that Terrence recognizes that this commendable undermining of white power and privilege may actually occur amid an internal struggle to overcome the habits of whiteness. This, again, captures the notion of the always unfinishedness of white antiracist identity and the ongoing unknowing in which the white racial equity worker must be involved.

7.4.4 Ethical/Moral Stances vs. Interest Convergence and Opportunistic Engagement

Though the terms discussed above could appear to be prescriptions for the white racial equity worker, I have endeavored to argue that these terms are largely expressions
of the participants’ expectation that their white colleagues do racial equity work for the same (ethical/moral) reasons that they do it themselves. If this is a reasonable expectation, then it implies that while the body is paramount in the epistemological terms of racial equity collaborations, the axiological terms transcend the body and are rooted in a higher overarching sense of ethics and morality. Throughout the discussions about the terms of engagement above—the Sense of Equality, Standing Up, Naming and Calling Racism, and Taking Risks and Concretely Undermining White Privilege—it is difficult to ignore the decidedly moral claims within the participants’ narratives, and through which they stake out their positions. Statements that refer to these terms as “the right thing to do,” (Diane) and as an obligation (or calling) that one cannot deny (Imani); or to the absence of these terms as “failure within yourself” (Quentin), indicate the deep ethical/moral (or what Dei (2008c, p. 67) prefers to call “spiritual”) dimensions of racial equity work and, therefore, the ethical/moral foundations that the participants prefer for their collaborative relationships in racial equity work. Indeed, in a way that agrees perfectly with Dei’s discussion of the place of spirituality and spiritual knowledge in racial equity work (2008c, pp. 70-71), the participants’ positions make the compelling argument that it is impossible to do effective racial equity work or to create effective racial equity coalitions without engaging the deep moral aspects of our being. Dei writes that “[t]here are limitations to subjecting racism and anti-racist practice [solely] to the faculty of ‘reason’ and human ‘objectivity’ (2008c, p. 71). From the participants’ perspectives, these limitations are evident in the superficial and ultimately either non-

---

37 I am not arguing here that all Blacks who get involved in racial equity work do so for moral reasons and out of the sense of calling that I am speaking about here. The reader should recall the discussion in Section 6.4.3 about Blacks who also do racial equity work for selfish reasons. The participants are no more accepting of these Blacks than of the Whites who do it for selfish reasons. However, these participants seem to do the work out of a sense of calling, and expect the same of all their colleagues, Black and white.
productive or counter-productive racial equity work that results from the failure to engage the ethical and moral dimension.

This is an important consideration, and brings the data from this study into conversation with the Critical Race Theory literature on Interest Convergence and Dei’s (1999; 2008c, pp. 67-80) work on spirituality in antiracism work. In the following section, I review the Critical Race Theory literature on Interest Convergence, and speak about the overlap, tensions, and contradictions between interest convergence and ethical/moral dimension raised by the participants.

7.4.4.1 Interest Convergence

The Interest Convergence principle, first proposed by Derrick Bell, seeks to provide a legal/historical explanation for those moments when racial equity goals appear to have been advanced. Weighing in on a much earlier debate (sparked by the famous United States civil rights case, Brown vs. Board of Education) which sought a neutral legal basis upon which the competing concerns of racial groups might be decided, Bell agreed with the earlier consensus that “[w]hen the directive of equality cannot be followed without displeasing the white, then something that can be called a ‘freedom’ of the white must be impaired” (Black, 1960, p. 429). This principle seems self-evident, and is based on an understanding of whiteness—particularly that the racial privileges of Whites come at the expense of Nonwhites. It also raises the moral notion of “the right thing to do.”

However, while Bell agreed that this should be the case (Bell, 1980, p. 523), he endeavoured, with a quarter century of hindsight on Brown, to explain why Brown had not had nearly the revolutionary impact upon Black education in the United States that
most felt it would. He proposed the Interest Convergence principle which states that, in practice, “[t]he interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523), and that “[t]his convergence is far more important [in terms of precipitating factors] for gaining relief [for Blacks] than the degree of harm suffered by Blacks” (Bell, 2004, p. 69). Further, Bell applies this as a general principle with application far beyond beyond Brown. Bell argued that Brown v. Board was only decided in favour of desegregation in order for the United States to gain strategic advantage in the Cold War politics of the day by resolving the contradictions between the way it treated its own citizenry and what it was demanding of communist bloc countries. In other words, this scathing critique frames the Brown v. Board decision and other civil rights decisions not as an epiphany or change in the collective ethical/moral mindset in the United States, but as “a case of white people doing themselves a favor” (Delgado, 2006, p. 31). Not surprisingly, this thesis was not well received at the time of its proposal (Delgado, 2006, p. 31). Nevertheless, Dudziak’s (1988, 2000) work of historical investigation has thoroughly substantiated Bell’s argument—at least in the case of Brown. Others have since argued that the Interest Convergence principle was also at work in other US racial equity gains (Delgado, 2006). Bell does not deny that there are Whites who pursue racial equity for moral reasons, but he contends that the number of these has been too few to explain Brown and other civil rights gains (Bell, 1980, p. 525).

One of the implications of the Interest Convergence principle is the corresponding observation that where the interests of Blacks and Whites diverge, there will not only fail to be progress in racial equity, but there will also be a reversal or undermining of any
previous gains made through interest convergence (Bell, 1980, p. 526; 2004, p. 69; Castagno & Lee, 2007). Further, these legal and policy changes, are aimed at superficial manifestations of the problem of white supremacy (such as segregation) rather than at the ideology of white supremacy itself (Guinier, 2004, p. 99). Consequently, ostensible racial gains are celebrated as moral epiphanies when they have actually been conceded in order to advance the interests of whiteness, were resisted all the way to their realization, and have left fundamental racist ideologies unchallenged (Bell, 2004, pp. 197-198; Delgado, 2006, p. 65). It therefore becomes increasingly difficult to make the case that additional (real) racial progress that truly challenges white supremacy is necessary. Ironically, then, whiteness is secured through these interest convergence “gains.”

Lee (2007) extends the principle of Interest Convergence to speak of Cultural Convergence. She makes the case that legal defense arguments made on behalf of Nonwhites and which rely on cultural arguments are seldom successful except where the there is “cultural convergence” between (white) American cultural norms and the cultural norms being advanced. In other words, where lawyers argue that cultural norms were a factor in precipitating a criminal act, their defense is only successful if the crime is one toward which American courts already tend to be lenient based on racist and sexist American understandings. Examples of such crimes, Lee claims, are those where men kill their wives because of the woman’s unfaithfulness, or where women kill their children and attempt to kill themselves because of their husband’s unfaithfulness. Ironically, through these defenses, crimes committed for the same reasons they would be in the United States are attributed to the racial/cultural “otherness” and “un-American-ness” of the defendant. As with interest convergence, these strategic Cultural
Convergence moves, in this case used to secure the freedom or reduced sentence of defendants of Colour, actually entrench existing racist ideologies.

Thus, on the basis of the Interest Convergence principle, Bell has concluded that despite superficial changes to the expression of racism and the removal of certain *de jure* racist policies, *de facto* racism remains and is permanent (see Bell quoted in Taylor, 2004, pp. 272-282). The question then becomes whether and how to resist racism in the face of its permanence (Bell, 2004). Bell proposes a form of doing the best with the hand you are dealt. Others have claimed that racial progress decisions “may … [be] the product of forces far beyond the [oppressed] group’s agency” (Delgado, 2006, p. 57).

However, others have found Bell’s assessment pessimistic. Cashin (2005) for example, finds it is “unsurprising that any social group in power would oppose policies that they perceive to be contrary to their self-interest, even in the face of moral counterweights” (p. 255). Cashin prefers to focus on the positives that have come out of Interest Convergence policy decisions, and argues that many of these decisions, certainly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, came out of a combination of the resistance efforts of Blacks (2005, p. 263) and coalition politics based on interest convergence (p. 254). Cashin argues that despite the persistence of racist ideologies and anti-Black sentiment (p. 282), capitalizing upon interest convergence to forge racial equity coalitions is crucial to achieving racial equity (p. 255).

Bell’s and Cashin’s positions may not be completely contradictory. They simply differ in terms of what they see as the desired result. Cashin is willing to settle for the superficial gains and incomplete reforms (which Bell does not deny) that close “existing gaps of racial inequality” (Cashin, 2005, p. 255) in the face of ongoing, deep-seated anti-
Black racism. However, she does realize the need, at some level, for a moral dimension to a social justice movement (Cashin, 2005, p. 277). Bell, on the other hand, does not consider racism to have been eradicated where racist ideologies remain, and he understands it to be driven deeper through interest convergence strategies—which he yet deems as the only way to make any racial equity gains. The difference between Bell’s and Cashin’s arguments may be related to the level of intervention. Bell may be thinking on the level of broader, sweeping, systemic change, while Cashin is limiting her arguments to more local strategies to achieve specific ends. In either case, the Interest Convergence principle seems to me to raise the pertinent question as to whether the interests of whiteness (not necessarily those of individual Whites) can under any circumstances be considered congruent with the goal of racial equity. This question, then, returns us to the central dynamic of this study—the contradictions and tensions between whiteness and Black interests and agency in racial equity work.

7.4.4.2 Significance of the Interest Convergence Debate to the Present Study

In response to the question about whether the interests of whiteness and racial equity can ever converge, this study, and the participants’ ethical/moral terms of engagement seem to side with Bell, returning a clear answer of “No!”, at least within the context of racial equity collaboration. While in the broader circumstances of winning racial equity gains from Whites who are invested in the racist status quo the kinds of strategic moves based on Interest Convergence for political ends of which Cashin (2005) speaks may well be necessary, the respondents seem to insist that their white colleagues in racial equity work ought always to be operating from an ethical/moral commitment to
racial equity rather than from their self-interest or an empty sense of obligation. They want their white colleagues to be sincere allies with the same level of commitment that they have. They disdain those who are otherwise, as we see where Diane says:

**Diane:** One of the problems there with that group is that, ah, not all, but many of the people in that group are doing this work less because of the fact that it is socially redeeming than for some personal benefit. … So to me there are two kinds of groups, or two kinds of liberals, if you like. Those who are sincere and those who have some personal interest, whether it’s job advancement, or whatever it is, for doing the kind of work that they do.

Clearly, she understands those who do racial equity work for reasons akin to interest convergence to be insincere and problematic. Other participants express their disdain for those ostensible allies who take this approach. Terrence relates a conversation with someone—a supposed ally—who had hired him to do a workshop:

**Terrence:** So after it was done, I was doing a debriefing with the very person who had hired me. And the person sits there and said, “You know, this exercise on stereotypes was great. I never knew I had so many different stereotypes about groups. But you know, I don’t have anything against Black people. But I have a tough time with P*kis.” And I’m sitting—. This is the guy who hired me to motivate his group to make the change, and the only thing that was on my mind was, “You racist pr*ck!”, because there’s no such thing that, “I don’t have something against Black people, but I have something against P*kis.” You have something against “P*akis,” you have something against—. {laughs}

**Philip:** As you can imagine, if it had replaced you with somebody who was Pakistani—

**Terrence:** —It would have been, “I have nothing against—.” {both laugh} Yeah, so I’m sitting there and I have to finish this discussion, this interview without displaying any form of emotion, when inside of me, rage! I’m burning!

Terrence is outraged by the insincerity of this person who, unknowingly, has clearly displayed his lack of commitment to racial equity. While we do not know the circumstances under which this man invited Terrence to do the racial equity workshop, it
is not unreasonable to conclude that it was because he had either been mandated or pressured to do so. James shares a similar conversation:

James: when I was with the public service organization, my boss, they were talking about filling the quotas. They had to have a certain number of managers, and I’d been there. So we went to our management meeting [and he said] “That’s not a problem anymore. We have James Owusu here, we have the one. We are required to do one. We’ve got one.” {strikes the table}. So he said this.

I said “You know this is a public service organization and this is the policy branch. I would have thought you would be more willing to go beyond just the basic requirement of one.” One? Me? So you’re happy? You should be ashamed of yourself! That’s what I thought.

And this guy, big guy, and he said. “Well James, I hear what you’re saying but I’m telling you I was required to have one. I have you and that’s it. No more discussion.” See that approach surprises me. There’s a white guy sitting there, you know, and I’d think he’d be more willing to listen and say maybe, to say, “OK. We’ll explore it.” No! [He says,] “We got one. That’s all.” And that really—. I used to have a lot of respect for these guys because it was very, very good in terms of the work we did and I admired him I used to think of him as my mentor—till that day.

In James’s case, he is taken aback by his colleague’s sense of imposed obligation rather than moral commitment to equity. He is not interested in a diverse workforce. He is simply interested in minimally meeting arbitrary standards so that he will not be penalized or accused of inequity.

Finally, Maryam shares her story:

Maryam: I remember at that time, the president stating something. We were in a meeting, and someone was talking about the need to balance the number of students towards the number of employees—that it’s always good on clientele to see the representativeness of the staff. And he reacted violently, the president of the Board of Directors, and he told, “Are you telling us, us Franco-Ontarians, who fought a lot that we have to accommodate others?” So for me it was a total lack of leadership, and even of intelligence. … So that’s the poor attitude that I have seen.

Once again, there is evidence of lack of moral commitment to racial equity from a white colleague who ought to have known better.
Thus, the participants in this study do not want their colleagues to be colleagues only out of convenience, but rather of commitment to racial equity. One should not have to coax and cajole Whites into doing racial equity work by appealing to how it benefits them, as is often done, for example, where equity initiatives are promoted by arguing the business case for diversity. To reiterate, it is not that there are not some occasions when this may be useful, or where it may be used as a coping strategy to navigate the tension in racial equity collaborations as we will see with Terrence in the next chapter. However, the participants ask that those who would name themselves allies be motivated out of a sense of ethical/moral commitment. It is also congruent with their disdain for racial equity initiatives that over-employ humour and lightness (Quentin) or that are unwilling to create a level of discomfort necessary to evoke change (Imani, Sharon). These strategies are not only ineffective, but they appear to grow out of a desire to play to the interests and comfort of Whites. The Interest Convergence literature also shows us where these kinds of strategies entrench whiteness and deepen the disconnect between the egalitarianism that “Western” societies declare that they stand for, and the reality of racial inequity in those societies.

Finally, returning to the reality (mentioned in Section 2.1.5) that Whites come to racial equity work with a variety of motivations, we see that the Black racial equity workers in this study might only consider as allies those who also have a deep ethical/moral commitment to racial equity. The terms mentioned in this chapter, then, may serve for the participants as standards for determining who their real allies among their colleagues are.
7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined both the epistemological and ethical/moral terms of collaborations that the participants seek in their collaborative work with Whites for racial equity. Epistemologically, the participants enjoin their white colleagues to adopt an epistemology of unknowing that will challenge the embodied epistemology of ignorance that is most often the default epistemology for Whites in white supremacist society. Morally, they seek a deep ethical commitment to racial equity that transcends and even challenges the interests of whiteness, or what Lipsitz refers to as the “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 1998). Together these inform and are informed by a white politics of humility that should guide the involvement of the white body in racial equity work, and distinguishes between sincere white allies and those Whites who come to the work for other reasons, claim egalitarianism, but come short in their commitment to its realization.

The following chapter will discuss some of the terms of engagement for Blacks in these collaborations, and the strategies of agency and resistance they may use to navigate the contradictions of these collaborations.
CHAPTER 8

STRAINS OF RESISTANCE: BLACKS NAVIGATE THE CONTRADICTION

8.1 Introduction

Foregoing chapters in this work have discussed the contradictions that attend involving whiteness in racial equity work. The way that whiteness adheres to the white body makes this an important consideration where Blacks are allying with Whites in this work. The previous chapter outlined the terms that the Black participants in this study set, largely for Whites, in their racial equity alliances. This chapter addresses some of the terms to which they hold themselves. Also, taking a symbolic interactionist tack, it addresses the micro-level strategies of agency and resistance that the participants use to navigate the contradictions and tensions within these alliances, and attempts to explain these by clarifying how each participant is positioned as s/he does the work. I have chosen not to hierarchize the participants’ strategies of resistance, choosing, instead, to identify them all as resistance that is differently constrained by social structures and the specific conditions of their racial equity work.

8.2 Creating Space for Agency and Resistance

In responding to questions about how they resolve disagreements they may have had with their white colleagues, the participants indicate at least two levels of disagreement. First, there are those instances where the disagreements are the usual type that one finds in any team. These are resolved through negotiation, as Imani indicates:

Imani: Well, like any other difference of opinion. Through discussion and explanation of why you think it should be this way and why they think it should be the other way. I’ve been in lots of situations like that, and it’s been resolved. Sometimes, you know … it’s my decision, my suggestion that’s been taken and
sometimes theirs. … you try to explain to them why you think it’s needed, and they try to tell you why they don’t think it is. And you try to come to some consensus, and very often—I can’t say very often, but sometimes, I don’t know—I can think of locations when it’s been resolved by, “Well, I don’t feel comfortable with that. If you wanna do it, you do it. Now how can I—, what can I do?” You know, that sort of thing.

Many situations of this type will involve compromise. Terrence recounts an example here:

**Terrence:** So, I wanted something on a national level to signify to the organization that there was a deep commitment [to racial equity]. And, there are a couple of other people who didn’t think it was a good idea. They wanted a scaled-down version of the event. In the end, I agreed with the scaled-down version of the event. Was it what I wanted? No. But I’d rather get that than nothing at all. I’d rather get their buy-in to host that event, than to do the national event without their buy in. So in my job, sometimes you have to learn that in getting to the end-state, you may not be able to do that first, as you want, and second, as fast as you want. I remember a saying—I think it’s an African proverb: “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

There are other instances, however, where the participant felt that compromise was unacceptable since it would undermine the racial equity project and the principles of racial equity. The study participants suggest that it is in these instances that the contradictions of whiteness within racial equity collaborations sometimes create grave risks for Blacks who decide to stand their ground. The risks here are not the general risks of opposition to racial equity work that come from outside the team. Rather, these risks arise when they disagree with Whites within the team, and because of complex power imbalances between them and their white colleagues. Diane speaks of the personal repercussions in this type of situation:

**Diane:** Well I think that goes with the consequences of choosing, I guess really, to stand up to a white person who’s doing the work. So I’ve had very troubling experience in that context because there is always the question of power imbalance, and there is always the question of retaliation and the ability to retaliate. So when I disagree, it’s not the same thing as two white colleagues disagreeing with each other. When we disagree with a white person, quite often
that can have consequences way beyond the argument between those two people about a way of doing things. So you know, if you want to head in a certain direction with respect to antiracism and the white participant either wants to write the report—let’s look at it this way—wants to write the report and wants to take credit for that report, and you have to stand up to that, that can have not only serious consequences with respect to the context of the report, but it can also have consequences because of the struggle when you have to stand up and say, “I won’t sign on!”

Diane is quite specific about the effect of race and power imbalances in these disagreements, and points out the differential consequences for white and Black bodies of disagreeing with a white colleague. Yet, the Black colleague in these situations is compelled by her/his integrity and commitment to the racial equity cause to take the stand and accept the attendant risks. Terrence relates a similar situation. It involves a disagreement with a white colleague where he feels that compromising would undermine the racial equity cause. The situation is complicated by the fact that he feels the situation could be resolved by appealing to another white colleague with greater institutional authority than them both, and who he feels would agree with him. Terrence says:

Terrence: On this one, the key to resolution may be to appeal to higher up, because if you heard me describe some of my colleagues earlier, I’m pretty sure he will say, “You’re right, Terrence.” He’s the kind of person who doesn’t round corners. “I want to know what I don’t know. And if this place has a bad culture, I want to know about it, and see how do I deal with it.” But in the system there are gate-keepers, and it’s their job for things like that not to happen. My problem is simple. Going higher on an issue like that, even if I end up winning, I’m gonna lose, eh? So the decision that I have to make is how important it is for the cause, and not only for the cause, but how important it is for the job that I do. And it’s simple. I do not want to be a figurehead. And there are fights, if you lose them, you become a figurehead. And my life is too sort on this planet to be getting a paycheque and be a figurehead. There’s a million other things that I would like to do with my time. So that’s a very real process that I’m going through right now. I don’t know the end of the process, but I know this is an area where with a colleague, we completely disagree.

We see here that even though Terrence is assured of the support of someone with greater authority in the organization than the colleague with whom he has the disagreement, he is
well aware that there may yet be repercussions to winning in that manner. At the same time he is faced with the fact that not taking the risk may totally undermine his credibility as a racial equity worker. He is not willing to do this. Diane tells us more about the imperative of standing up for the principles of racial equity even at great personal cost. She presents them as occasional occupational hazards of doing racial equity work:

**Diane:** so that was the very vicious kind of fight which I ultimately won. *But,* in the process of winning, when you do go up against white persons or institutions, there are lots of retaliatory consequences to that, and you have to be able to withstand those. So, like I said, I could give you lots of examples, but there were also people within that group of white people who genuinely believed that the extra support classes should be mandatory [for the nonwhite students] because they felt that they were good for the students, and it would help them get through university. And they didn’t understand when I talked about stigma, and when I talked about patriarchy, and when I talked about oppression. They didn’t understand any of that. They thought I was being difficult.

The “missionary”-type approach of her white colleagues in this instance is clear. They are not only entrenching racial inequity in the name of helping people of Colour, they are also refusing to recognize the importance and salience of the nonwhite voice while making these types of decisions. Diane resists this approach, but at great personal risk.

What, then, are some of the conditions that the Black racial equity workers attempt to set up in order to insulate themselves where the contradictions of racial equity collaborations force them into simultaneously winning for the racial equity cause and losing at great personal risk? The following three sections discuss the participants’ strategies of resistance, and the advice they have for other Blacks who collaborate with Whites in racial equity work.
8.2.1 Embodied Knowledge as Resistance: The Black “Politics of Reclamation” (Dei et al., 2004, p. 9)

Before discussing more specific strategies that the participants suggest, it is important to point out that the emergence of the concept of Black embodied knowledge and epistemologies (the subject of Chapter 4) as such a powerful and relevant theme in the discussion about racial equity collaborations also indicates an expression of Black resistance.

Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) note the difficulty involved in making claims about the existence and nature of racism within a context that is always already invested in white privilege, and suggest that the racially oppressed adopt a new politics for working within this context. They write:

… resistance to racism and oppression is best made on the terms of the oppressed. How can we affect [sic] positive social change within frameworks that are designed to support and sustain the status quo? How do we prove the existence and scope of racism and oppression to the privileged if they cannot, or choose not to acknowledge it? … The time has come for a radical departure from the politics of negotiation and toward a new politics of reclamation. That is to say that we cannot continue to struggle within sites afforded to us by privilege. We need to establish politics and strategies of our own and we need to implement them in spaces and places of our choosing. We may be forced to “play the game,” but the time has come for us to “play by our own rules.” (pp. 8-9)

Dei et al. assert that the mounting of a claim by the racially oppressed about the nature of the social world we inhabit or about strategies for challenging racial inequity cannot depend upon the receipt of the consent and agreement of those benefited by the existing inequitable racial arrangement. My argument in this dissertation, and the position reflected by the participants in this study, is that these contentions enter into the dynamics between Blacks and Whites who collaborate in racial equity work. Within this context, the challenge to Blacks’ right to define our/their own experiences with race and racism
often comes, paradoxically, from those Whites who claim to be our/their allies in the racial equity project. Lattas (1993) identifies this dynamic in a discussion about contentions between white and Aboriginal scholars in Aboriginal Studies, drawing attention to the fact that Whites in these contexts endeavour to hold these debates on their own terms. He writes that they:

… seek to establish their truth-authority by claiming to be able to establish what counts as good-politics. But more than this, ‘good politics’ here often provides a moral language which justifies the therapeutic intervention of white intellectuals in the production of Aboriginal identity and culture.” (Lattas, 1993, p. 241)

Here Lattas points to a manifestation of the “missionary” dynamic (discussed in Chapter 6) whereby Whites become involved in what professes to be racial equity work on terms that reinforce the power imbalances between themselves and the Nonwhites with whom they work. However, he also points to the way that the terms upon which they do this work simultaneously seek to legitimize their inequitable interventions and to cut off the possibilities of resistance to these interventions from the racially oppressed. As Lattas goes on to argue, for these Whites, “good politics” is any politics that does not involve the body, and it is within a similar context that we see Blacks asserting their embodied knowledge and epistemologies. But what exactly is the meaning of Black racial equity workers’ assertions of their embodied knowledge of race and racism in the context of their discussions of racial equity collaborations with Whites? Lattas’s writing suggests a response. He writes:

… people trying to embody the knowledge which is the basis of their identity [is] so as not to have themselves and their culture totally appropriated and colonized by Whites. [This] operates as a strategy of resistance in a context where what the colonizing Other cannot appropriate from you is your own body and where therefore the internalization of your culture into your body becomes a means of preserving and owning the basis of your own identity … In making the body the site which allows them to own their perspective on the world, Aborigines are not
mistaken but are partly pointing to the fact that in a racialised society the body creates one’s experiences. (1993, p. 259)

Lattas reiterates that the history of colonization, particularly for Aboriginal and other indigenous people, has been one in which Whites have entered with ostensibly (or feigned) benevolent motives, yet succeeded in appropriating that which belongs to these groups and attempting to undermine their ability to resist this appropriation. Claiming embodied knowledge is therefore a pragmatic response to this climate of appropriation, which, as we saw in Section 6.4.2, is also present in racial equity collaborations between Whites and Nonwhites. This strategy undermines Whites’ ability to claim authority in resistance struggles that are not their own, and transfer that authority back to those who suffer racial oppression. However, this should not and cannot be seen as an opportunistic, unfounded, and empty political strategy for two reasons. Firstly, I have already made a thorough theoretical case for this embodied knowledge in Chapter 4. However, secondly, I again indicate that the idea of embodied knowledge is not some exotic claim peculiar to Blacks in this setting. I have argued in the previous chapter that Whites also have an embodied knowledge. It is only that they seldom name or explicitly assert it as such—particularly in the racial equity context. There is therefore a political struggle involved in this dynamic. While Blacks recognize the strategic importance of claiming their embodied knowledge, Whites recognize (or are taught not to see) the strategic advantage of failing to name their own white embodied knowledge. Blacks’ insistence upon the salience of embodied knowledge, and upon the particular salience of Black experiential knowledge of racism, is therefore one of the ways in which these Black racial equity workers choose to “play by our own rules” (Dei et al., 2004, p. 9). It
is one expression of Black resistance within the contradictory context of their racial
equity collaborations with Whites.

### 8.2.2 Be Anchored in the Black Community

In addition to asserting the salience of their embodied knowledge, the
participants, particularly Keith and Ajani, advise that Black racial equity workers
working in collaboration with Whites be anchored in the Black community. Keith
expresses the principle succinctly:

**Keith:** [If] you wanna build a house, and you wanna build a house that could
sustain or withstand high winds, the foundation of that home has got to be proper.
For a Black person doing race relations work in a white society, you have to have
good foundations. And that good foundation means **good strong Black support**.
So if you don’t have that strong Black support behind the work that you are doing,
you’re destined to fail. So, you have to have that support. Then you would
become stronger, and you can fight to the highest. {emphasis in transcript}

According to Keith, Blacks involved in antiracism work among Whites need to be
anchored in the Black community. This type of anchoring in the community affords
strength for the work and increases what the worker is able to accomplish. It involves
building relationships within the community. Ajani advises:

**Ajani:** I would say remember who you are. Remember your culture. And why I
say that is because that means remember those people who you go to. And
consistently consult with your elders; consult with your brothers and sisters. And
then when you do that relationship—that’s my advice, you know—remember who
you are. Because I think that, on a simple level, allows you to exercise political
power because then you know that you’ve got backing.

Ajani understands relationship building within the Black community as part of an
important identification process. It involves being mindful of the community
relationships that have sustained the individual, and establishing the commitment to
consult with the community as one works in its name. Keith speaks more about the fact that the onus is upon the Black racial equity worker to establish relationships with the community, especially if one is new to an area:

**Keith:** That’s the thing. You have to get involved! You have to get to know the Black community. … There’s a lot of Black people that live here. You have to take it upon yourself, “How do I get in contact with those people? Like, where do I meet them? Like, where do they meet? You know, “what kind of functions do they have, you know, be it educational or social?” And you have to be a part of that community if you’re looking for that support. That is your responsibility to access that, or access those resources that are there already, right? The West Indian Association has been in existence for 40 years, and I know a lot of Black folks that live here that [say], “Oh, I’ve never heard of the West Indian Association,” right? “I’ve never heard of Canadian City C Club, I’ve never heard of—.” Well, why not? Cause you’re not interested!

For Keith, engaging in racial equity work implies being an active part of Black community life. To not be so involved, to Keith, communicates a lack of interest in the community, and the community consequently has no obligation to support the racial equity worker, nor does the racial equity worker have license to speak for the community.

James shares how he stays in touch with the community and receives feedback on his work:

**James:** Well, you know, with our community, they give you feedback quickly. They’re not shy at all. So that’s positive. I do, during the weekends, address a lot of the groups, the associations in Major Canadian City 1, you know, wherever they come from, and that gives me a sense of how well we are doing and how far we have to go. … because of my position they do invite me, but I go only because of my color. I don’t have to go because it’s outside of office hours. So we don’t have to go. But I go because I feel a part of them, so I need to support them and help them understand better what my work is about.

James’s voluntary visits to different Black community organizations in his city serve as somewhat of an accountability loop whereby they can let him know their concerns, and he can inform them about the work he is doing.
The participants also make it clear that the strength of the racial equity worker’s community relationships determines the degree of political power that s/he is able to wield in her/his work:

**Keith:** If that’s the kind of thing that you wanna do, and you’re interested in doing the kind of work that we wanna do that’s dealing with Black issues in a white community, you have to, you know, you have to unite. You have to have community support, right? And that way you can move forward in any environment and speak freely on any issue without fear of any reprisals from white folks.

Keith clearly understands the risks that can arise for the Black racial equity worker if there are disagreements within collaborations, however he feels that these are minimized, or even eradicated when one has community support. One is then able to boldly say and do the things that one has to do. Maryam concurs, looking to a historical example to substantiate the claim:

**Maryam:** … you need to be backed up. You need to have this belief behind you. If Martin Luther King, if he was able to say the things that he did, it was because he had Blacks behind him.

{Underlined translated from French}

Ajani explains further how Black community support allows for this added space within which to work:

**Ajani:** I think on a small and practical level it means knowing that you have that person, that person, that person, that person within our community who is backing you, who will knock back [if] they [your white colleagues] should mess around. And on a grander scale, then, that group connects to something that will knock back if they do not work properly.

Here, Ajani explains that if something does go wrong and there is pushback from Whites, the Black community is able to exert its own power of resistance on behalf of the Black racial equity worker. However, this is not possible if those connections have not been established and maintained. Ajani warns of the consequences of striking out on one’s own to do racial equity work:
**Ajani:** … make sure that your community has some kind of input, acknowledgement, and agreement, and support. You know, if they don’t know about it, they don’t support it, then when you get screwed, no one knows that—“Oh, I didn’t even know that you were doing that!”

By maintaining ties and open lines of communication with the community, one avoids putting the community in the place of having to defend what it has not been informed or consulted about. Quentin explains that the Black community, like any community, is made up of individuals with diverse ideas and affiliations. To do work in the name of the community, or, even more, to assume a position of leadership in the community, clearly requires communication with that community. Quentin relates a conversation with a white friend:

**Quentin:** He said, “In the Black community, they’re not together, there’s no real leadership!”

And my comment to him at the time, I said, “I don’t understand what you mean by that. Why is it alright that in the so-called dominant society,” I said, “there’s a Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, an NDP Party, a Marijuana Party—we can have all these parties, and they’re always fighting amongst one another, and they’re all white, and you think it’s alright. But what I’m hearing you say, Greg, is that I can’t have”—Greg’s white—“I can’t disagree with a Black colleague because we’re being seen as divided.” … We got into this whole discussion about leadership in the Black community, and leadership in the Black community, it’s one of evolution.

It appears that what Quentin is referring to here as evolution involves the work of communication and negotiation that it is necessary for the Black racial equity worker to do—particularly if, at any point, s/he is going to speak on behalf of the community. Indeed, it is possible that if one has not carefully attended to community relationships, thereby remaining in touch with the community’s desires and expectations, the Black racial equity worker can inadvertently usurp the community’s voice, claiming to speak on its behalf when this is not the case. This is, of course, unethical, and Quentin warns of the possible fallout:
Quentin: Media always wants to appoint one person as the spokesperson. The media will focus on that one person, and every time something in the Black community, or something in the community, period, happens, and it’s involving somebody of African descent, put the microphone, the TV cameras, and the print media in front of that one person and hear what they have to say. They put all that pressure on this one individual, but yet wait for him to fall, or her.

Philip: Well of course, because you’ve set him up among his own community.

Quentin: Set him up! So the poor guy or gal is sitting there and responding to all these questions and sometimes gets caught up a little bit in a lie, and might not realize what’s going on here. And so then the community says, “You know what? You were not appointed as my spokesperson. I can get up and speak for myself. I don’t need you to speak for me.” Besides, we disagree! \{laughs\}

The person who has assumed the role of spokesperson for the community without carefully considering the diversity within the community and the politics of being a spokesperson is vulnerable to strategies designed to undermine her/him. Keith warns that in the event of disagreements between white and Black racial equity workers, this kind of public disagreement between the Black worker and the Black community, as well as the tendency to read this as lack of consensus about the existence of racism and the need to challenge it, can be exploited—especially in support of maintaining status quo:

Keith: But then when you, now, as a Black person doing community work, you have to look at, “Are you speaking for every member of the community?” You have to be very careful, because a lot of Black people say, “Well that person, Philip, doesn’t speak for me,” eh? So how do the white folks look at that when you are here trying to accuse them of being racist, and trying to make changes, when you have a Black individual or group saying, “Well, that work is not necessary; we don’t need that kind of work in the community”? And the white folks look at that and say, “You don’t have a problem. Whatever we’re doing is right, because we have Black support. So we’ll continue to do what we’re doing.”

Keith further warns that there are even times when he, as a Black racial equity worker, has been encouraged by his white colleagues to assume positions and take stands that are not supported by the Black community, or of which the community is simply not
Keith advises that one should not consent to these offers without communicating with the community. He says:

Keith: And if I was here to profile myself, Philip, who the hell knows where I would have been today? Because people are always trying to push you here, push you there, push you there.

Philip: Are these white people?

Keith: Not Black folks. … The white folks is like, “Keith, oh we’re trying to encourage you to move to a different level.” And I say, “No. I ain’t going there unless my people are behind me.” I don’t wanna go by myself. I don’t care how high it is. I’m not going there—alone. {laughs}

Keith is not claiming that the white colleagues who seek to push him forward are doing so maliciously. In fact, the opposite may be the case. However, Keith is making it clear that it is not sufficient to have only the support of Whites without having the support of the Black community. Otherwise, this too can serve to isolate the Black racial equity worker from the Black community and leave her/him without support in less propitious circumstances.

Keith: So if you want to influence anything, you have to be very cautious, because once you get a push, you’re looking for support, there’s nobody behind you to hold you up right? {laughs} So you’re down on your *ss in no time.

In summary, then, Keith and the other participants insist that if the Black racial equity worker wants to be effective—particularly when s/he works in collaboration with Whites—s/he must seek the support of the Black community. This foundation will both anchor the worker in the community, reminding her/him that s/he does this work as a community member on behalf of a community, and support her/him in those times when the contradictions of the collaborative context pose risks to the worker.
8.2.3 Focus on the Goal and Don’t Sell Out!

In addition, to securing the support of the Black community the participants also advise that it be made very clear to all involved, at the beginning of the collaboration project, what the terms of relationship and the objectives are. This serves as a point of reference if and when disagreements arise between white and Black racial equity workers. Ajani says:

**Ajani**: And then in that relationship with your white allies, document what you’re doing and the intentions. It’s equity work. I should hope that an African descendant doing equity work would be thinking of helping Black people. … So given that, I would say write that down—your intention.

**Philip**: My own? For me? Write it down for myself, or write it down for everybody to see?

**Ajani**: For everyone to understand that this is our goal moving forward, and to make sure you put the benefits to our people that need to be apparent in the results of the fruits of what you do.

Ajani advises that outlining the outcomes of the work should include a clear articulation of the racial equity goals and how the project is intended to benefit Blacks. He relates this advice to his apprehensions around appropriation (as discussed in Section 6.4.2), pointing out that, historically, Blacks have not benefitted from their own work:

**Ajani**: I would advise a very clear definition of what you wanna see happen. Because many organizations start out to benefit our people, and we put in so much work—especially in those times when that work is free—and then down the line it’s forgotten. And again it comes back to appropriation which seems to be something so—, it seems so central. I think it is central, because that is on all levels what continually happens. That’s been the relationship between quote-unquote white and quote-unquote Black.

James also insists that the Black racial equity worker needs to keep in mind the racial equity goal and the benefit that Blacks should reap from it:

**James**: We have to stay focused on our final goal. We want to help our people. We want to eradicate racism—well not eradicate, but minimize it. We want to
reduce the issues that we have. So, those are some of the things I would say. We cannot give up! We cannot give up! You have to keep fighting!

This determination and focus does not mean that one is not strategic about how the racial equity work is done, and how the racial equity relationships are navigated. With respect to doing the work, James adds:

**James:** You have to keep fighting! *But* choose your battles very carefully, because there are so many of them every day and you’re not gonna fight them all. So pick the important ones and make sure we get them right.

We recall, here, Terrence’s and Imani’s excerpts at the beginning of the chapter which showed their willingness to compromise where compromise is possible. James’s advice about choosing battles seems to fit well here. He will choose the important battles that lead toward racial equity, and compromise or avoid those that might be less critical or which may undermine the work. However, the focus upon the intended outcomes of the collaborative work, and clearly articulating this in advance allows the racial equity worker to be able to identify where compromise begins to happen at the expense of the work. The goal here, in Terrence’s words, is to not “become a figurehead”—that is, one who is nominally doing the racial equity work, but who has bowed to the contradictions and pressures of doing this work in a context where whiteness influences the collaborative relationships.

Among these pressures is that of wanting to be liked by one’s colleagues. This may be a trap since it can get in the way of the work. For this reason, Imani advises:

**Imani:** Establish very quickly from your manner that you are selling the work, not yourself—that your focus is on the work. You’re not gonna be a good old boy, nor are you gonna be the pouty Negro that they—and I do use Negro deliberately—that they show on the television. You’re just a person, competent, capable, friendly—in other words be polite—but your focus is on the work. So establish what that work is with your employers and with your colleagues so that when they know you’re coming, they know what you’re coming for. … don’t
compromise what you’re doing for getting by. You’ll get by if you focus on the work … And then it becomes easy. It isn’t a matter of position. It becomes easier when they see you know what you’re about; they know why you’re there, they know what you’re doing, da da da da da da. Has nothing to do with “isn’t he a nice guy. Isn’t he—?”. I mean you don’t wanna be a buzzard, you know. I’m not saying that. But it has to do with the work, so you’re already refocused, you know. Refocused! And it’s just that. And they know what you’re gonna do, so that you’re not always having to sell out and back down.

Imani establishes here that laying out, in the beginning, the focus and goals of the work and your commitment to it will help one to navigate those difficult times when, as with Diane at the beginning of the chapter, your white colleagues feel that you are being difficult because of the stand you are taking as part of the work. At those times, one’s efforts will remain directed toward accomplishing the racial equity goals of the project rather than toward trying to be well-liked at the expense of the project objectives. The racial equity worker is then less likely to “sell out and back down.”

Finally, when there is an open agreement about the goals and desired outcomes of the project, it operates as a benchmark for the work such that when the work is no longer fulfilling that purpose there can be a reckoning. Ajani says:

**Ajani:** So clearly define so that down the line if that is off your constitution, it is clear to see. … on a practical level now, you can move forward. “This [i.e. the outcome] doesn’t look like this [the agreement]. What’s going on?” And then if that is the case, especially if it’s that kind of relationship where you’re able to share that with your people who are your allies outside of that arrangement … all of those people should stand beside the brothers and sisters in that equation.

Ajani is saying that in the event that there is a departure from the stated outcomes of the project, or when the benefits that were promised to Blacks do not materialize, this departure can be made clear through comparison to the original objectives. Then, as necessary, Black community support (established as per the advice in Section 8.2.2) can
be called upon to help challenge this departure and/or make sure the project is put back on track.

8.3 Micro-level strategies: Participants’ individual expressions of agency and resistance

In this section, I survey the ways that the participants in this study, as Black racial equity workers in varied circumstances, exercise their individual agency and resist the contradictions in racial equity collaborations. I relate their diverse strategies to the ways they are each positioned within this dynamic, teasing out gender and class considerations, in order to show the tensions between how their approaches shape and are shaped by these conditions. The strategies shared here are necessarily limited in their ability to comprehensively resist whiteness because of their location at the micro-sociological, individual level. However, the grounded theories discussed in Chapters 4 and 7 outline the resistance the participants envision and enact collectively. This discussion provides an important part of the picture painted by this project, in that it describes and analyses the interplay between constraining social structures—in particular the dynamics of racial equity collaborations within a racially inequitable context—and the individual agency of the Black racial equity workers. Where it is available, I start each of these discussions of the participant’s resistance strategies with some of the biographical information s/he shared in her/his interview. I position these as “sentinel statements” (Asante, 2002) (see Section 3.1.3.3) in order to assist in the location of the participant’s personal politics. The reader has had a chance to get somewhat acquainted with the participants by this point in the document. Thus, where excerpts from previous sections of the document substantiate my arguments, I do not repeat them here.
8.3.1 *Sharon and the right not to engage*

Sharon is well aware of how the contradictions in racial equity collaborations, and some white colleagues’ obliviousness to them are an assault on her humanity and dignity. Sharon therefore exercise her agency by exercising the right to leave these situations where there seems to be no alternative. I trace this understanding of her agency below.

Sharon sees herself as having come somewhat passively to a critical race consciousness, at first simply because of the experiences she has had from an early age with racism and colonialism. She says:

**Sharon:** … so I know from an early age living in Jamaica that something was wrong, and something was wrong with being Black. And I was thinking about this the other day. I was trying to remember at what point I understood that there was something wrong with being Black. … It wasn’t until I went to Kingston and started going to school and living in a family where I understood that my colour meant something, and it didn’t mean something good, right. And I remember growing up with my aunt and her husband, and you know, we couldn’t play reggae music because it was the music of “those Black, lower class people,” and we didn’t want that in the house. Or going to school and being told you can’t speak patwa [Jamaican], because you know, that’s the patwa of “those Black people” who don’t have any ambition. You wanted to speak the *Queen’s English.*

However, as she grew older, Sharon actively pursued further knowledge that would explain her experiences, and she has worked to better understand race dynamics as well as the dynamics and her own privilege around other axes of inequity. This is an ongoing process in her life. For this reason, she expects from her white colleagues in racial equity work the same critical stance and examination of personal privilege. She says:

**Sharon:** You need to be part of a very serious intellectual community, to have these sorts of discussions and to understand this, and to understand how your privilege works, and to understand how racism works.

Sharon has no respect for, or confidence in, those Whites who have not done the work of understanding how they are socially located. Particularly for those Whites who
are involved in racial equity initiatives, Sharon feels it is their obligation to have done this work and to understand the seriousness of having to do so. She says:

**Sharon:** I just want to see that you have a sense of awareness in how you talk about the world.

and,

**Sharon:** Only when you have that sense of awareness about the world can we really have a good working relationship if we’re gonna collaborate on antiracism work, or if you’re going to do antiracism work yourself. You need to understand these things.

In Sharon’s opinion, for her white colleagues not to do this work is to trivialize the effects of racism on those oppressed by it. In light of the discussions in the previous chapter, what Sharon is looking for here is for her white colleagues to become aware of and explicitly name their own embodied knowledge and take steps to overcome the epistemology of ignorance. Sharon is also not interested in having to be the one to teach her white colleagues about race and racism:

**Sharon:** Those are the sorts of things I would be looking to find out [from a potential white colleague], right? And what track record do you have? I’m not here to like—. I’m not saying that when you work with people you shouldn’t learn something from them. Absolutely! And I learned a ton of things from Judy [Sharon’s white colleague], but I’m not here to hold your hand. I’m not here to say, “Oh, you know, this is how racism works, and I’m gonna tell you stories that have happened to me to enlighten you. I don’t wanna do that.

For Sharon, it is the white person’s responsibility to have done this “homework” and sought out this information before getting involved in racial equity work.

It is where her white colleagues fail to do this “homework” that Sharon’s agency within the contradictions of racial equity collaborations is evident in her refusal to engage this disrespect as it is manifested in white obliviousness, or in acts that reinscribe white privilege rather than challenge it. When incidents of this nature occur, Sharon repeats
throughout her interview that she won’t “go down that road” or “won’t have that conversation.” She feels it is her white colleagues’ responsibility to understand the impact of their ignorance upon her life and the lives of other Blacks, rather than her responsibility to understand their insensitivity. She refuses to be drawn into “care-giving” at these points—even where she may seem cold or unsympathetic.

Sharon: When I try to challenge white people on their foolishness, especially white women, they bawl. … the tears come and then you feel like sh*t, or you’re supposed to, right? So you see how it plays out, right? And then of course, as a person of Colour, you either walk away and say, “I’m not dealing with this,” or you fall into the role of caregiver. It’s really sick! I mean if you do antiracism workshops with white people, especially white women, and you challenge them, and they start to take it personally, you have to know what you’re doing so you don’t—. Because the natural response is to want to go and be sympathetic. I’ve learned, “Uh, uh! If you wanna cry, you go ahead and you cry. I’m gonna sit here until those tears dry up, and then we’ll continue, but I’m not your therapist. I’m not your therapist.”

Sharon understands the obligation to challenge whiteness, but she recognizes the possible repercussions. She therefore speaks about “finding the spaces to do this kind of work.” She navigates the tensions between Black agency and white power by adjusting her approach depending on the possible repercussions, but she maintains a strong sense of the responsibility to challenge racism. However, Sharon’s discomfort with environments she considers disrespectful because of white colleagues’ lack of critical race knowledge has, in many instances, caused her to pull out of the dynamic altogether.

Sharon: You know, I’m quite facety \textit{i.e Jamican for feisty}, and I don’t take anything from anybody—which is why I haven’t had like a string of steady jobs for a long period of time because I generally get p*ssed off and say, “f*** off!” Sharon is unwilling to live continually under these disrespectful circumstances that tear away at her agency, and this is one way in which she manages or completely avoids the contradictory dynamic in racial equity collaborations, and the personal repercussions upon her of racist environments, for she says:
Sharon: I can’t take that stuff with me, otherwise it will kill me. And I’m not letting any white person kill me!

Thus, Sharon is keenly aware of the contradictions involved with doing racial equity work in collaboration with Whites. She is quite impatient with Whites who feel they can do this work without thoroughly investigating their own power and privilege and thinking deeply about how it affects the collaboration. She makes the effort to find spaces to do this work under these restrictive circumstances, but is likely to pull out of them altogether when she feels that the contradictions of the work and her white colleagues’ lack of attention to their implication in them become an assault on her dignity.

8.3.2 James: White power in the Black body

James’s story is one of embodying the contradictions inherent in racial equity collaborations with Whites, and this affects his own sense of agency, which stands in contrast to the agency he has actually demonstrated through what he has accomplished in his racial equity work.

James came to his racial equity work initially less through a sense of calling, and more through the way that the responsibilities of the job coincide with his training and skills, and a secondary commitment to “give back” to the Black community. He says:

James: My preference is really to do work in {career area omitted for confidentiality} which is what my passion is. Getting into racial equity work actually came by accident. It wasn’t one of the things I wanted to do at all, and I still don’t want to do basically racial equity work. I got attracted to this because of the change aspect of the work. The organization has been going through a change process, so I was brought in to manage the change process, and it just happens to be racial equity work. … And since I got in though, I found it quite interesting. I have come to the conclusion that it’s not bad. I need to, having been out in this country for so many years, being Black, visible minority, I think
it’s about time I gave something back to the community I come from before I retire. And that’s really my goal.

Nevertheless, James does identify strongly with the Black community, referring 19 times to “our people” or “my people,” and because of his own and his children’s experiences he feels a sense of obligation to be a part of improving prospects for Blacks in Canada.

Because of the organizational level at which he comes into racial equity work, James sees his present position as placing him into the power structure where he can effect change:

James: Institutional power is very important because it shapes the way you are able to do the work, the way you become effective. And to me, the important thing for me, especially for our group, our people, is to be part of that institutional power. I am part of the institutional power here so I can effect change for my people and that’s what I cherish. See, right now, when I go out there and I deliver speeches people are scared of me—not because I’m Black, not because I’m James Owusu, but because of the title I have. … I say to myself “Oh! Amazing! For once I can actually tell the white man off.” It’s true! So I always encourage our people, we have to make sure that we become part of that power structure. … This is where your voice can be heard. This is where the change can occur.

James tells us that, given his high rank, he does not have to half-step. He is also backed in his stance by the organization’s racial equity policy, and sees himself as having the ability to enforce the letter and spirit of those policies. This is very different from the kind of approach one takes in grassroots, community-based, racial equity work where he feels one has less power, and where more effort needs to be put into negotiation. He says:

James: Here I have the [organization’s] backing behind me which is solid. I go with the [organization’s] stick, so it’s a lot easier to get things done, so I don’t necessarily have to be diplomatic. In a community setting it’s a different ball game; I’m working within the community, this is what I’m trying to do. I have to have a lot of buy-in from them which is so important. Here, it’s not very important. I should [be diplomatic], but I just don’t have the time to because I have the [organization’s] backing behind me and the authority is there, the power is there. So it makes a difference. The community setting goes totally different.
There’s a lot of things I do here that I won’t be able to do in a community setting. I have to be more diplomatic, very careful, more persuasive, more convincing, ah, gently, quietly. Now, I don’t have to do that.

For James, the fact that he has institutional power makes this job different from community work. He will do this work because of that power, and because of the opportunity to lead, and not follow, in doing this work. In fact, James claims that he would not do this work if he were taking direction from Whites:

Philip: And what if you reversed roles here? Like, I mean, you’re the guy with the big stick here. Suppose that was a white man and you were one of his subordinates?

James: That would have been tough. I wouldn’t have done it. In this environment, particularly in this field of racial equity, no! I mean I have worked in similar situations. I’ve not always been a boss, but you know, if you’re dealing with business development for businesses in Canada it’s not a big deal. The boss is white, I’m dealing with policy issues with public service organizations, yes the boss is white, I’m not dealing with the four target groups. I’m dealing with all Canadians. So it’s a totally different ball game. But here, when I’m dealing with my people, no! … That’s why I always said this, you know, when we started talking. I said to you I was not interested in doing racial equity work ’til I found out what this was about. I said “Wow, in that case then I’ll do it.” ‘Cause I realize here I had a little bit of power, I had a little bit of say, I can actually effect change without listening too much to who the power is up there, because I have to advise them. They don’t tell me what to do.

Thus, we see that James balances out the contradictions of racial equity collaborations by only working in positions where he has institutional authority over his white colleagues rather than the inverse. In his opinion, this kind of authority allows him to move equity projects out of the process/stalling stage into the outcome/results stage (see Section 6.3.2). Interestingly enough, though, despite James’ self-assessment, an analysis of his own agency through his “I”-statements suggests that James may have a somewhat exaggerated view of his own agency and power at work. Such an analysis shows that James seems to use his agency to speak out at work about his intentions to take radical
moves forward in the equity project of which he is a part. He talks a good talk. However, he does not relate incidences of having made much change. This is not to suggest that this will not eventually occur, nor that he has not challenged the tendency to stall racial equity endeavours, but it does pay attention to the fact that he may be restricted in his role by bureaucratic processes that are larger than his individual will and intentions.

This observation may point to where James is located in the spectrum between Black agency and reliance upon white power. In James’ case, the power he feels he has to effect change is actually afforded to him by a predominantly white power structure. This would lead to the contradiction between the power he feels he has and his track record of having effected change. These are the contradictions of using white power to undermine white power. Indeed, the contradictions of racial equity collaborations of which we have been speaking may well be internalized in James’s case.

James’s own awareness of this contradiction is not expressed directly, but seems to come out at some points where he looks at the larger picture. At those times, he seems to have a more conservative and realistic view of how much he, as an individual, can change. He seems to waffle back and forth between feeling like he can do a great deal, and feeling that despite his efforts he may not be able to do as much as he would like—even for his own family.

**James:** when I look at my children ... I say to myself, “Gee I’ve been very blessed. Yes, I had problems but it was a lot easier to get jobs than they are going to have. So I’m saying this for selfish reasons, but because of them we have to continue the fight. We have to make sure that when it comes time for them to start looking for jobs they can at least get something to feed themselves and take care of their families. Yes, I would be hard pressed right now, and I’m not comfortable I’m not convinced that my children would have the same standard of living as I have because it’s so hard for them to get jobs. And this is what is
happening in our community today. So it is so important that we don’t just sit quietly in our little corners, which is what I used to do before I got this job, and this job is what really has changed me. I had all these ideas but I couldn’t really implement and talk about them ’til I got here and I said, “Yes this is the chance for me to really make a difference.” So if I’m able to impact one person in the community then I think I’ve done something I [will] have felt I haven’t taken away from all of them because, after all you know, some people had to go through the hassle to set the standards and open the doorway for us, and we are enjoying it today. But our children and their children? I don’t know!

Thus, James attempts to resist the contradictions of racial equity collaborations with Whites by ensuring that he is in a position of authority over them in these collaborations. However, by undertaking this work within situations where his power and authority are afforded by white institutions, he has not really escaped the contradictions, but internalized them. He speaks about being able to institute change, and take a more aggressive approach to the specifics of his work than his white predecessors (as we saw him discuss in Section 6.3.2) but his track record, and his own thoughts when he addresses the larger social context paint a much more modest picture of his power to effect change.

8.3.3 Maryam: “Open, Honest, and Direct”

Maryam’s resistance story is one of navigating the contradictions within racial equity collaborations by continually asserting and reasserting her humanity, dignity, and right to respect without conforming.

Maryam immigrated to Canada to find that it was not at all what she had been led to believe. Highly qualified Blacks were not able to grasp the opportunities the country was supposed to afford:
Maryam: When I arrived, all the people I met who were, of course, Black people—(when we arrive here, the first people we meet are your own people)—so all the people that I met at that time were all Black people from Africa or from Haiti, and all those people were on social welfare. And I was surprised because although those people were highly qualified, highly educated, they were just on welfare. So, it was fascinating, because when I learned it was Canada, I thought it was the country of opportunity, the country of everything, and right under my eyes I was seeing a problem. … those people were all on social welfare, and they were frustrated.

Maryam understands the social constraints and inequity that give rise to this situation, and feels it is compounded by the frustration that Blacks consequently feel. She refers to this frustration at length eight times in her interview, and sees it as a possible disadvantage of Black-only racial equity groups and projects. She says:

Maryam: the disadvantages that I have seen [in Black only racial equity groups] is sometimes, you know, we are so frustrated. So many frustrations put together can be very—, can be killer. We need people who can overcome the frustration.

However, Maryam sees herself as one who has been fortunate enough to escape the trap of unemployment and frustration.

Maryam: I joined a francophone visible minority organization and I was amazed by all the frustration, by all the relationships, the power relationships, between the mainstream community and those racialized minorities. So I developed my interest. Few months after that, I found a job, fortunately for me. And what was amazing, it was through that channel. Someone called me from the organization and told me, “You know, Maryam, there is a job …

Maryam’s story is therefore one of repeatedly defying the limitations of race, and Whites’ low and/or stereotypical expectations of her and her abilities. She has great respect for those Whites who accept her as she is and realize her potential. The following excerpt about her first job in Canada illustrates this:

Maryam: I had to develop a kind of program … I took my time to read because I was new in Canada, … so I had to understand all the environment. … So I took some time to read within and out of the work and to take notes, and for them, they couldn’t accept my approach, because for them I was there writing, reading, I was there for my pleasure, not for work. And the director who was really mad of me,
convoked a meeting in order to get rid of me, and she asked, “OK. What we are going to do is everybody is going to talk about his or her specific project and the advancement of the project.” So at that day, I came with all my papers, and my turn came. So I distributed [the papers] and I had developed two programs … And they were fascinated. And I explained them, you know, I put there all the resources to link with—everything—the outcome that we may have, how to measure our outcomes—everything! And they were shocked …!

Maryam relishes this story of defying the low expectations of her first supervisor.

Maryam also sees herself as not necessarily fitting the mold of other Blacks either, and is often found explaining Canadian society to her Black community members, defying their expectations of her as well. She advocates for a common humanity:

**Maryam:** When I arrived in Canada, my oldest [child] befriended a white young kid, and they used to, you know, sometimes sleep over at his place, or the young white guy used to come, [and] an Asian kid used to come to our place to sleep over. When my community learned about that, they were shocked. “How can you let your kid play in a white house? They are all pedophile. Oh la la, They are pedophiles. You can’t! They have no religion, they—.” So I have to work the people, tell them, you know, we used to have those people. What do you feel about the guy marrying a 12 years old girl? So, you see, I try to defend them by using what is existing in our own community. … and me, what I used is what was existing back home to demonstrate that it wasn’t particular to one community. Bad things could happen everywhere and good things could happen everywhere.

{underlined translated from French}

This attitude of common humanity and her right not to fit molds defines the approach Maryam takes to navigating the tensions in her collaborative racial equity work and to resolving the conflicts that may arise with her white colleagues. Maryam’s power and agency is that of the right to be who she is. In a key excerpt from her interview, she says:

**Maryam:** I want to be normal, me! I don’t want—, you know, it’s a stress to live everyday life, OK? If you start to accommodate, “Oh I have to sit in that way,” it’s inhuman! It’s harassment! Why am I going to fit? If for example there is a workplace organization or culture which is different from everything, and every employee, white or Black or—, had to comply, yes! But if I have to change my mind, everything, my {unintelligible}, the way—. No! I’m not a puppet. I am normal!

{underlined translated from French}
Maryam resists frustration, which she feels often comes from a combination between the pressure to conform and the consequences for not conforming. Maryam is not prone to bowing to white power, or to being tempted by the elusive promise of white power at the expense of her integrity, dignity, and identity. Consequently, Maryam believes in being “open, honest, and direct” and uses these terms 25 times in her interview. For example, she says:

**Maryam**: I think it’s important. You know, as a Black person, you have to develop—even if you know that you are a minority—that inside yourself you have still that you are yourself and you are a Black person, and you fill up the space of your body, you know. You have to develop a strong effectiveness about your being and about your own self. And I think people like that. You can, you know, you can transmit them that.

and

**Maryam**: When you are yourself, you can cross the world!

**Philip**: No apologies.

**Maryam**: No apologies! No apologies and no aggressiveness. Be direct! You don’t need to be aggressive. Be direct. That’s it! And fairness.

By “fill[ing] up the space of [her] body”—that is, holding strongly to the fact of her and other Blacks’ humanity, and her/their right to her/their own perspectives and ways of knowing, her colleagues often have no choice but to welcome her voice and person. Through this process she has turned more than one enemy into a friend.

**Maryam**: I was in insult because I couldn’t fit in any box. So she hated me. But I left her and, you know, she was so tired of hating me that finally, OK, she overcame. We became friends … she tells me that “you are so direct.” And the same thing, she will call me, she told me, “You know, everybody told me that you are direct.” I am not unfair. I can’t be unfair. It’s important to be fair. As long as you are fair, you are on the right road. But it’s so important to continue to be direct for us.
Yet her belief in Whites’ right to their perspectives as well cause her to advise them to also be “open, honest, and direct” in expressing their frustrations or misunderstandings.

**Maryam:** If someone is direct, it’s OK for me. If someone is direct, if someone is able to express his or her self openly and, you know, without any fear, I like that. But if the person is cautious, I feel like, you know, “No! I can’t trust.”

**Philip:** But I know some white people who would say, “Well, I wanna try and make sure I don’t say the wrong thing.” I think—. I dunno. Let me not put words in your mouth. But there are people who say, “Well I really genuinely don’t want to offend, and so that’s why I’m really cautious with my language.” What would you tell that person?

**Maryam:** Why do you want to offend me? … They have problems. If you are cautious it means that it’s ingrained in you, the race thing, the racism thing. We are all human beings. Express yourself! You know, it’s paternalism. Like your kids, you never pronounce the word “sh*t” in front of your kids because you want to protect their ears. You know, that’s the problem. Don’t consider me as a kid. I can take it. … Yes for a white ally, if the person is already an ally, or wants to be, it’s “Be open! Be direct! Don’t be afraid to ask questions. As long as you are not asking questions, you are not learning.”

For Maryam, this open communication lays the ground for strong relationships across race lines. To some extent, this aspect of Maryam’s approach seems to fit with a liberal view of “race relations” as cross-cultural communication. This view is seductive in its suggestion that racism is a result of lack of knowledge of one another and poor communication skills. It suggests that racial inequity can be undermined through education and the simple decision to get to know more about each other, and Maryam positions herself within this dynamic as a teacher. However, this understanding of racial inequity does not pay adequate attention to social structures that set the conditions for how we relate to each other. However, Maryam’s affirmation of her and other Blacks’ humanity and right to “fill up the space of the body” fits well with the concept of embodied knowledge discussed in Chapter 4. It represents Maryam’s sense of being
anchored in her identity, and is a form of resistance within racial equity collaborations that will not be stymied by others’ impressions of her.

8.3.4 Diane: Taking Stands, Facing Consequences

Diane’s story is one in which she fully recognizes the contradictions of racial equity collaborations, but where she simply steels herself and takes the stands she feels she needs to take, and braces herself for the consequences she knows she will receive. Her agency is expressed in her willingness to charge headlong into these situations on the basis of principle in order to achieve racial equity ends.

The time allotted for my interview with Diane did not allow us to explore background biographical information beyond what she shared in the Background Information Survey (see Appendix II). However, Diane has been doing equity work for 20 years in an academic setting.

Diane sees herself as an expert on racism—particularly by virtue of her personal experience of racism, and she feels this translates, generally, to all those who are racially oppressed.

Diane: My belief is that as Black people, and as racialized people, we are the voices of expertise in our own oppression and we have ownership in that work.

As discussed in Chapter 4, while this thesis has argued from the participants’ combined narratives for the notion of epistemic salience (Dei, 2006b, p. 11) rather than epistemic authority and expertise, the discussion in Section 8.2.1 suggests why the participants might claim embodied knowledge in the first place, and why this might be presented as authority and expertise. Diane’s position leans strongly in the direction of epistemic
authority, and this may result from her need, particularly in an academic climate, to ascertain that the salience of her voice and experience is not denied. This is, of course, exactly the type of tension that has been the subject of this thesis. In the face of this contradiction, Diane is willing to extend trust to those Whites who wish to fight racism, and that trust is strengthened when they also will stand up and name racism as necessary.

Diane: I guess I would have to say that I start out from the position that everybody is worthy of trust. Having said that, though, what that means is that I’m willing to give anybody a chance. And it’s only when I’m involved and there are issues that arise that I will either withdraw my trust, or extend it very cautiously. … It’s like being in a relationship right? While when I first meet someone, I’m, you know, got first blush and all that stuff, and this is great and, you know, fantastic. But that person has to earn the trust. It’s not—, it’s not given willy-nilly.

She does, however, often find herself in the position where this trust is betrayed. In those instances, and on the basis of her embodied knowledge, Diane uses her agency to insist on being heard, and to take stands against her white colleagues whose approaches reinscribe racism.

Diane: There used to be a white director to this program and when he wanted something, he just put it in place period. And while I tried to—, because I thought my job was not only directing the program but also educating about racism and oppression, so I actually took the time to explain it {laughs}. But when I hit the wall of resistance, I just simply used my authority and did—. But the fact of the matter is that even in these positions our authority as Black people is often undermined. I just happened to be fortunate enough to be able to just say, at the end of the day, that as director of the program I was going to use my authority and if you didn’t think I had any, fire me! {laughs} you know. But that takes courage.

Diane is well aware of the consequences of taking such stands, and has suffered them repeatedly. Yet she accepts this as an occupational hazard of doing this work, and does the work anyway.

Diane: Oh there are huge, huge personal consequences for any of us who are doing [racial equity work]. In fact, I think there are huge health consequences just
living Black in this world—whether it’s in North America or other places. We have higher incidences of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness. And in my view—and in fact it’s not even just in my view, ’cause now they’re starting to look at the consequences of racism on health, and a university is conducting a huge project on that. So racism, and even doing the antiracism work can have a huge toll on the health of Black people. Ah, stress, they have higher incidences of stress-related behaviour, and we also have a high rate of burnout. We have a high rate of people who are either leaving their jobs or being forced out of their jobs because they have taken positions.

Diane also sees her embodied knowledge and authority as affording some measure of duty to teach about racism and to be there for Whites who have suffered consequences for standing up to racism, though she does not feel that this is an obligation (see Section 6.2.2).

**Diane:** But the advantages [of coalition work] are that you educate some white people who are open to being educated, and that is a plus. Even if it’s just one person I think it’s a plus that they ultimately get to recognize some of the subtleties of racism. So it has an educative aspect to it. …

And

**Diane:** There have been a few [white] people that I’ve worked with that have really gone the distance … I guess the down side to that is that … is that when that happens and there are consequences to the white person … then you have to do the nurturing. … So, in some senses I resent it, but I recognize the value of having to do it. But we have always, I think, always been nurturers as a people.

This contradictory liberal position about teaching Whites to overcome racism in spite of her structural understanding of racism may be the result of the authority she feels on the basis of her embodied knowledge as well as the setting in which she works. Diane’s own intimate knowledge of race and racism, and her experience of many Whites’ lack of such knowledge creates a gap she feels compelled to try to fill, and this compulsion may be compounded by the fact that Diane does her work in an academic setting where she is surrounded by an investment in the value of education as a response to social problems. In the face of inequitable structures within which Diane feels she can make a difference,
though at great personal cost, Diane may resort to teaching as a more hopeful, less painful, way of making a difference.

Thus, Diane resists the contradictions of racial equity collaborations through her sense of embodied knowledge and authority on the subject of race and racism. On the basis of these, she will take stands that are unpopular with her white colleagues, fully aware of, and steeling herself for, the consequences of doing so. Diane will, however, also assume the responsibility to teach Whites about race and racism, hoping to change the contradictory dynamics of her collaborations through this type of pedagogical intervention.

8.3.5 Quentin and Strategic Alliance

This was one of my shorter interviews because of time constraints and other circumstances beyond my control. Much of the interview was spent making sure that Quentin brought his general insights about doing racial equity work down to the specific focus of the research, which concerns the terms of his alliance relationships with white racial equity workers. Therefore, there is insufficient data to speak more than tentatively to Quentin’s strategies of resistance as related to the context of racial equity alliances.

However, there is a discernible theme in Quentin’s approach to his racial equity work and resistance. I open this section with Quentin’s description of his involvement in racial equity work. He says:

Philip: … so this first question I’ll ask you is “What kinds of antiracism type initiatives have you been involved in?”

Quentin: Well, ah, I guess you name it, I think I’ve been involved in it as far as this province is concerned—from fighting the justice system this province, to the police services in this province, to employers in this province, education initiatives, the public school system. I’ve done it! And I’ve done a lot of work, I
guess when I was in the corporate community, but even, I guess, in my earlier years at the University where I was fighting the fight mostly with employers and the government, particularly around the public school system and the lack of inclusion in the public school system for people of African descent.

The repeated use of the term “fight” stands out and the language of battle is evident throughout the interview. It appears to be the metaphor that Quentin uses to understand his work.

Against this background, Quentin seems to take the approach of being as strategic as possible, as in a war game. He attempts in advance to control as many variables in the work as he can, and this allows him to be as prepared as possible for the unpredictable. Thus, Quentin thinks carefully about who he will ally with under what circumstances to get maximum results, saying:

**Quentin:** I worked with individuals of white and First Nations: a white male and a white female and a First Nations Miq’maq female. Who I worked with depended on the audience I was going to. So I would pre-screen the audience and then I would select who was going to work with me. … With the white male, I used him a lot of times because the power is in white males. So, we could reinforce one another. … **So that** had an impact on audiences. Now, that didn’t work as well if it was an all female group. So, I wouldn’t use him with an all female group. I used my female friend from the Miq’maq community because the dynamics are different, and the message that he would send to an all female group is quite different from the one he’s sending to an all male group.

This suggests that Quentin is aware of the effects of his choice of ally upon the audiences he is trying to reach, and uses white allies only when he feels there is a particular benefit. As we saw in Chapter 5, he uses a white male ally when he feels it would be advantageous for this ally to speak in concert with him about the reality of racial inequity. However, this apparent use of the white voice to validate his own does not seem to extend to their working relationship. In the one disagreement that Quentin describes with this white ally, Kevin (see Section 6.3.1), Quentin assessed what he felt needed to be
done and took the initiative to act without seeking approval from Kevin, who seemed to be soft-stepping. It would appear, then, that like James, Quentin expresses his resistance by maintaining control over whether he will enter into collaborative racial equity work with Whites at all, and when he does, by making sure that he enters on terms that guarantee that he will have flexibility and space to call the shots without necessarily having the consent of his white colleague.

8.3.6 Ajani: African-centeredness

Ajani’s story is one of becoming Afrocentrically re-centred. He feels that Whites have secured power with respect to Nonwhites by ideologically controlling ideas and the terms for evaluating worth, and by appropriating that which is not European. His resistance is expressed in seeking to live on his own terms rather than upon these Eurocentric terms, and by insisting upon the kind of respect from his white colleagues that will recognize African-centered ways of knowing, and openly acknowledge and honour the ways that Whites benefit from their collaborations with Blacks. I flesh out his arguments below.

Ajani recognizes racial inequity as rooted in power imbalances and the right some presume to define others:

Ajani: I think racism is a disorder which has certain people using an excuse in order to put others into categories, and those categories allow those people who are creating those boxes for people to be empowered. I could probably go on and on, but I’ll say in a basic term, I think that’s what it is. It’s an illness, and it’s a tool for someone who doesn’t believe in equity, doesn’t believe in a fair shot, because maybe they feel threatened because that if there was a fair shot they think they wouldn’t be able to have an abundance—more than an abundance.
From this excerpt, we notice that Ajani speaks in terms of empowerment rather than power, as such. He says Whites have created categories and hierarchies in order to empower themselves (and by implication to disempower others) and seems to think in terms of white power as a part of the white racist imaginary—the civilizational assumptions (Scheurich & Young, 1997) that structure their relationships with Blacks. From Section 6.4.2, we also see that one of Ajani’s major concerns—particularly in the context of racial equity collaborations with Whites—is that of cultural appropriation.

Ajani considers himself to have been provoked into this critical consciousness and understanding of racism through his experience and by a community elder:

**Ajani**: I was born in Jamaica, came to Canada at a very young age, and was able to go back to Jamaica. So I think that that allowed me to see what they call racism from a couple of different perspectives. And when I started to become mature, an elder who is still an elder started to pose questions and ask—, at least get me within myself asking certain questions—about the way that we are portrayed as a people, about our knowledge of history and so forth.

Through the avenues of his definition of racism and the prompting he has received from community elders, Ajani seems to have come to his particular understanding of racial equity work:

**Ajani**: That’s what really got me into—. You know, when you say antiracist work, it’s interesting because it *is* antiracist work because it’s really the consciousness of true equality and its importance of all human beings and their place at the table of humanity. However I don’t really think of it as antiracist work; that’s not my focus.

Ajani’s understanding of racial equity (or antiracism) work truly expresses the essence of what that work should be—that of ultimately operating from the assumption of the basic equality of all humans and their rights to voice and equitable relationships. Yet Ajani seems to say that he prefers to focus less upon opposing racism than upon affirming the value of African people, their culture and their history. This approach is not to be
confused with those arguments that suggest that to speak about antiracism is to create or reinscribe racism (see Dei, 1996b; 2006a), for Ajani does admit that what he does is antiracist work. Ajani is also not suggesting binary standards whereby one must employ either one or the other strategy, and he is not necessarily valuing one strategy over the other. However, within his paradigm of empowerment, he focuses (primarily) upon establishing and operating from assumptions and positions that will empower Blacks, which will also (secondarily) counter the devaluation of Blacks and overvaluation of Whites that empower Whites in white supremacist society. In other words, Ajani has made the conscious decision as a person of African ancestry to focus his efforts upon the Afrocentric thrust to establish a “place to stand” for Africans that is not defined by Eurocentric or white standards (Asante, 2003, p. 45).

Thus, Ajani’s approach seems to be that the best defense is a good offence, and that he will achieve the ends of racial equity by working with an African-centered orientation. I note, then, that Ajani has used his agency to chart his own course of study and to enter an active quest for African-centred knowledge, realizing that this is not where Blacks are encouraged to focus in white supremacist society:

Ajani: So I would say, for me, I was getting so much Europe growing up, that when I started to *really, really* build on a scholarly level, for many years, I didn’t wanna hear *nothing* about Europe. I wouldn’t buy a book [about Europe]. “European Great Lea—.” I wouldn’t care. I only wanted African knowledge.

And he enters the quest recognizing the need to surround himself with like-minded community members whose knowledge he can draw upon:

Ajani: … if I don’t give respect to my elders for what I know, what I’ve been shown, or that spark that’s been lit within me, if I’m like {gruffly} “Yeah. I studied and I know everything”—. No! That’s ridiculous. Because if it wasn’t for someone showing me, “Yeah, what about this question?”—just asking the question … if it wasn’t for some of these people showing me that what I’m
valuing isn’t so strange, so abnormal—. Because I’m telling you, I’m in a circle where growing up a lot of people weren’t thinking about the things that I was thinking about.

His emphasis is on shared community knowledge.

From this centered place, which he arrives at through focused study of African knowledge, he is then able to explore knowledge about other peoples:

Ajani: And then it got to a point where I wanted to learn about other stuff. The Natives [sic]. So I’d get a book and I’d learn about their histories. Chinese and Asia. And I’d learn a little bit about their histories. And then I realized we were in that European history, we were in that Chinese history, even the Native history, but because we’ve been so washed out of that history I didn’t know about at that time—. It took going through that whole process.

As he explores this other knowledge from a centered position, he is able to discern the fact that his previous lack of access to African knowledge is not incidental nor innocent, but deliberate. Africans have been actively erased from their place in world history, and, for him, this kind of erasure has been an important feature of the historical relationships between Blacks and Whites:

Ajani: … that is what has been the pattern. We’ve been taken out of history; we’ve been taken out of so many contributions. You know, you see these guys that hand out these documents that [say], “Did you know that Black people invented this, invented that?” [It’s because] we’ve been extracted so much …

Ajani’s understanding of the white supremacist erasure of Blacks from world history in the discourses of Euro-North American society organizes his approach to collaborative racial equity work with Whites. Without allowing himself to be jaded, he refuses to operate from a position of obliviousness to the past. Ajani believes in being vigilant. Speaking specifically about collaborative racial equity work with Whites, he says:

Ajani: … because time and time again what we’re talking about is the biggest assault on our people, is cultural appropriation you know. So if you think “Oh
there is no difference between us and them”—again quote unquote “us” and “them,”—there’s no difference; you’re gonna see that in a generation or two you didn’t know that that thing had anything to do with you or your culture or your people. And this is just historical. So as much as someone they may say, “The fact that you’re looking at that is horrible.” I’m not a bitter person, I realize that what we’ve gone through has been a great, great, blessing along with the hard times, you know. So it’s not a matter of being angry with them or this or that. All I’m saying is realistically, when you go through something and you—. You know, as they say the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over without changing, and expecting different results. Well if we as a people continue to go through this in the same way without saying, “Hey, we’ve got to adjust and look at the wise scholars and the wise people in our community and look at our history and see what we need to do differently—.

Ajani leaves the statement hanging, implying that the obvious result of ignorance of or failing to act upon the knowledge of the past would be that we repeat the history of being victims of erasure and appropriation. Thus, Ajani rejects colour-blind, ahistorical perspectives that would cause him to ignore the fact that the present historical moment is an outgrowth and extension of the historical relationships between Black and white, and he rejects perspectives that would paint him as embittered for taking this into account.

Thus, Ajani’s African-centeredness and the caution he has learned from his knowledge of history structure his approach to his racial equity collaborations. When asked what he looks for in a white colleague, he answers:

**Ajani:** I will probably say, at the top of it is respect … a lot of times there’s this underlining assumption of dominance, of, ahm, standard. That’s the opposite of what I’m looking for if I’m working with someone, ’cause that is one of—, that is the tool of global domination because that is used to belittle you, to take your own idea and present it in a way that all of a sudden you’re extracted out of that.

What he seeks more than anything else in the relationships within his collaborations with white colleagues is respect. This respect is expressed through a fundamental sense of equity (as discussed in Section 7.4.1), and in other ways as he explains in the following excerpt: Ajani also feels this respect is expressed through a willingness in the white
colleague to acknowledge that which s/he has reaped from the collaborative relationship and the Black colleague’s embodied connection to the work.

**Philip:** … is there some level of accountability or connection between the work, because they’re advancing a struggle that could be identified with your breaking out of your oppression?

**Ajani:** Very good question. And I think it’s like how we respect our elders and our ancestors. They [Whites] should always be paying respect to us. The reason why is because it will be appropriated. If they go out and just say, “Oh yeah. I’m about this,” they’re gonna bring your principles, and they’ll be brought to the masses, and you will not be acknowledged. … I’m not a capitalist. So I don’t believe that every inch of this world should be owned and monopolized and so forth, and sold and bought. *But* if someone is going to then put a book together and say, “This is what—.” Can you imagine if someone sits here and reads your material and then goes out and speaks, but no one’s hearing you but they’re hearing them? It’s, like, their responsibility to mention you. That would be the ground rules if that’s the case, remember that relationship.

Ajani also feels that respect from his white colleagues is expressed through a willingness in the white colleague to acknowledge that which s/he has reaped from the collaborative relationship and the Black colleague’s embodied connection to the work. This will mitigate the tendency to appropriate Black knowledge and extract Blacks from that knowledge. He recognizes that there is a delicate balance between this requirement and what he calls capitalist claims to individually owned knowledge and cultural production. He does not seek to enter into the idea of ownership, but he does seek acknowledgement of the relationships that create knowledge. He describes what this might look like with reference to the music industry in which he is involved:

**Ajani:** We have a thing where someone will jump—, in Jamaica they’ll jump on a beat, and it doesn’t really matter that much whose. You big-up* the person whose beat it is, but it’s not like, “Hey! Don’t do that! That’s mine!” It’s something that becomes hot. It gets around, and everyone knows. The person that made that beat gets more props. And they know that it’s a mutual, reciprocal relationship. [to big-up = to acclaim, respect and applaud]
His emphasis, then, is not on ownership, but rather upon mutual benefit. Ajani therefore uses his agency to actively seek out these terms of relationship in his racial equity collaborations, and expects his white colleagues to respect them. However, Ajani also sees the corresponding imperative for Blacks to use their own agency to claim and own their/our own accomplishments as a people, and to continue to do so in the face of Whites’ tendency to overestimate their own accomplishments. With reference to my work on racial equity collaborations, he says:

Ajani: … I think the work is so vital because, like you said, whether we choose to or not, they’re [Whites] moving in that position [racial equity work], and basically the law of appropriation, or the pattern of appropriation, is that they’ll always see their people doing a certain work. They’ll recognize and acclaim their people. What we need to do is recognize and acclaim our people. I don’t wrong them for acclaiming their people because I mean, the question is, “Why on all of this earth and the universe don’t we credit our people that do a certain work?”

Finally, as we have seen in Section 7.2.2.3, Ajani will also use his agency, as necessary and where he can, to decide when to collaborate with Whites in racial equity work and when not to:

Ajani: Yeah, simply we [Blacks] should have space to do what we have to do, and there should be other mechanisms that we [Blacks and Whites] then can work [together] on mutually beneficial, mutually affecting, things that will affect both.

In summary, then, Ajani works within the contradictory dynamic of racial equity alliances by doing the work of re-centering himself in an African worldview, by being vigilant about his alliances to ensure that his white colleagues approach the collaborative relationships respectfully and willing to acknowledge the benefits of collaboration, and by reserving the right not to collaborate in some circumstances. Ajani defines his identity and anchors himself within a strong sense of community with other Blacks.
8.3.7 Keith and having Black Community Support

Keith has lived in the same area for decades, and he is deeply involved in community work. His interests are bound up in the collective interests of his community. He says:

Keith: And as a proud Black person, you know, I want what is good for all of we children. Not just my children, all of our children. I wanna see when my child or your child walk down the road, people must have respect for them, right?

Keith’s strategy for resistance to the contradictions in racial equity collaborations is the one identified in Section 8.2.2, where many of the excerpts come from Keith’s interview, and so will not be repeated here. Like Ajani, Keith believes strongly in being anchored in the Black community. As discussed in the section above, his power and right to speak within racial equity collaborations without fear of reprisals is rooted in his sense of community.

8.3.8 Terrence and Erasing his Own Agency

The story of how Terrence navigates racial equity collaborations is an extremely interesting one, differing substantially from those of the other participants. His strong sense of reliance upon white power puts him in a position where he simultaneously downplays his own agency and puts up minimal resistance to the contradictions in his racial equity collaborations.

The opening minutes of Terrence’s interview are littered with sentinel statements and ideas that might predict for us his particular manner of navigating racial equity collaborations. For example, Terrence’s understanding of the dynamics of racial inequity sets him apart from the other participants. He is invested in the notion of racial inequity as primarily the effect of benign cultural variability: He says:
Terrence: ... the question I’m often asking myself is, “Are we a nation of racists?” In my view racist denotes an intent to exclude, and people acting on the exclusion. So, is there, now, a group of Caucasians sitting somewhere trying to exclude visible minorities or Blacks on a systemic basis in 2006? I don’t think so. I would not say that 40 years ago where people believe that if you immigrate from the Caribbean you could not become citizen because your nostrils were too big and you might breathe the cold air, it might freeze your lungs, or what we did to Japanese Canadians or Chinese Canadians. Those were very much intentional. So, I think what we are dealing with right now is that, not only the intent to exclude is not there, the desire to exclude is not there. And I’m not suggesting to you that we don’t have people that are racist. In every society you have individuals, but I think the issue we’re talking now is systemic. ... I think what we are dealing with now is more subtle. I don’t call it racism. I call it culture. I think right now discrimination is less based on ethnicity, and more based on culture. So how do I define culture? I talk about all the things that are non-specific that are part of how you dress, about how you answer a question, about how you greet, about how you pronounce—all those things that people take for granted has a big impact in terms of how we communicate. It seems to be now the source of exclusion to the point that you may have a Caucasian from Latvia experiencing the same experience as a Black person from Africa. To me that’s the subtlety in the differences. And in Canada right now, I think we are dealing with cultural exclusion rather than ethnic exclusion. If we were dealing with ethnic exclusion, I could not exist in an organization like this one. And there’s many people who look like me who exist everywhere. Those are people who have mastered the language, and they’ve gone beyond ethnicity to cultural integration—not assimilation, integration. I think this is the seat of the problem for most visible minorities, it’s cultural exclusion.

Terrence’s understanding of racial inequity pays insufficient attention to the ongoing influence of historical racist narratives and the salience of skin colour so that he takes the untenable position that the experiences of Eastern European and African migrants to Canada are identical.

Though he refuses to call it assimilationist, Terrence is committed to a view of racial equity work that is focused, at least in the initial stages, upon minimizing cultural difference. He says:

Terrence: The fact that I happen to speak and present myself the way I do to belong in the organization, it’s learning a new language. The same way I’m speaking to you in English, my mother tongue is not English, you can learn to speak different languages to quote-unquote get that. Because otherwise the more
culturally different that I am, the harder it is going to be for this Caucasian male to say “Come and play [golf] with me.”

Consistent with his culturalized view of racial inequity, he speaks in terms of helping Blacks to learn the language of the corporate world.

**Terrence:** The fact that I happen to be skilled at speaking executive language, to the same extent as Kerry, to the same extent as Bill, doesn’t make me less Black. All it means is that between the hours of 8:30 and the hours of 6:30, I’m speaking this language. When 6:30 rolls around and I’m no longer playing my organizational role, I am speaking my own cultural language—which could vary depending on whether I’m speaking in English with you, in French with somebody else, in Spanish with somebody else. We can be multilingual.

Terrence does not seem to pay attention to the ways that dominant white power sets the terms for that language such that it reflects itself, and that the white middle-class man may therefore not be saddled with the need to switch languages between business and off-work hours. Instead, he feels that Whites, unlike Nonwhites, learn the language quickly because they are represented at the top of the organization. However, this position does not explain why Whites mentor other Whites in acquiring the “language” (if, indeed, they do enter the workforce without this language) while they fail to mentor Blacks. It also cannot account for those Blacks who know “corporate language” but who still meet glass ceilings. This paradigm does not ask how it is that “corporate language” seems to mirror white cultural norms as opposed to other norms, and there is no questioning of the arbitrary designation of this language as appropriate, suitable and ideal for the corporate environment. Terrence does not seem to understand how this view and the failure to challenge it legitimizes racial exclusion and white power, while absolving Whites of the “intent” and “desire” to exclude. Instead, in his estimation, all the barriers
Nonwhites may experience come from their lack of awareness that there is such a language:

Terrence: I’m saying now to visible minorities, “You wanna become executives anywhere? Learn the language!” Because there is a language. The problem however, is that nobody’s teaching you the language. If you’re Caucasian, the moment you got into the organization, other Caucasians have cultured you to learn the language, and you become quite skilled at speaking it. If you’re a visible minority, there’s no visible minority on top to teach you the language. So if you’re getting roadblocks upon roadblocks upon roadblocks, you don’t even know why.

Note from the first excerpt, that Terrence also uses his own existence as a corporate executive in this particular organization as evidence to support his feeling that the desire to exclude is no longer a factor in racial inequity. Indeed, it seems that his sense of indebtedness to those who recruited him to work with this particular corporation influences his position. When asked to describe an effective white ally, he says:

Terrence: The easiest way to answer your question is just to say to you, “I’m here, and I’m talking to you.” And I’m talking to you because these people went and they got me.

Later, he also says:

Terrence: So, me sitting here with you in this position in this organization, I would have never been there if it wasn’t for a guy named Henry French at the bottom of the power structure who identified in me some good skills and one day said, “You know I can see you doing this”—and then Mike Walters, and then Burt Parkes, and then Chuck Best.

What I find intriguing about Terrence’s understanding of having come to his present place of employment is its almost total reliance upon the benevolence and good will of his white colleagues—even those with the least corporate power. There is little mention of his own skills, abilities, and considerable professional reputation that might have prompted them to recruit him in the first place.

38 For a more nuanced description of the language of power and the way that its potential to exclude depends upon the invisibility of whiteness to Whites, see Delpit (1988).
This undermining of his own worth and agency, and his exaggerated view of
white power carry through Terrence’s interview. Terrence feels that white men are the
locus of almost all social power, and therefore that antiracist change is initiated by white
men who have somehow been exposed or sensitized and have acquired a sense of fairness
and moral conviction. Without these men, he feels antiracist change is impossible. He
says:

Terrence: If the white male power structure is not behind you to make the
change, the change will not happen!

and,

Terrence: … we never would have gotten that far in Canada if it wasn’t for white
males. It was a bunch of middle-aged white males who passed the employment
equity act in 1986. We did not have a huge number of visible minorities in
parliament. It was a bunch of white males who say same-sex marriage is OK. It
was a bunch of white males who say Declaration of Human Rights. So, I’m not
bypassing what the white male can actually do. Far from it! They sow the seed
of major changes in Canada. And as much maligned as they are, the truth of the
matter is they change the system. So I look at the president of this corporation,
Dean Kerry. You’ll never find a bigger diversity champion than Dean Kerry.
This man has no reason to take this corporation through that change. It won’t
give him one more iota of dollars, not one recognition.

Not only does Terrence feel that white men are responsible for social change, he
understands them as doing it solely out of moral conviction, without any sense of
personal benefit. While, as discussed in Section 7.4.4, this is exactly the approach that
the Black participants in this study require in their allies, it seems somewhat naïve that
Terrence feels that all social change has occurred for this reason without seeing where the
resistance efforts and demands of marginalized people play a key role. In fact, he seems
to completely negate the idea that the racially oppressed might have any power—
resistance or otherwise—that would contribute to bringing about racial equity and social
change. When asked what advice he would give to Blacks involved in racial equity coalitions, he says:

**Terrence:** First, understand that the white person is coming from a position of influence, of domination, of privilege. And please understand that despite how mighty you want your blackness to be, you are not in a position of domination, of influence, of power. … The day that you believe that you’re as powerful as the white person you’re trying to get to champion the cause, you’re gonna be ineffective.

Nevertheless, Terrence does see a role for Blacks and other people of Colour in working toward racial equity. He feels that once white men have the will to see social change, the direction is provided by those who have experienced racial oppression. Speaking about the white man with the moral conviction to work toward racial equity, he says:

**Terrence:** He has an implicit understanding that things have to change, but for your change agent, you have to bring somebody who looks, feels like me. Otherwise you’ll never get the credibility, the passion, the drive to move the file.

and,

**Terrence:** A Caucasian male cannot work in diversity … what I want a Caucasian man in the power structure to do is to say, “I know there’s something wrong, and let me bring somebody in, that I’m gonna give all the tools to, and I’m gonna support, that I’m gonna believe in to make things right.

Yet even with this sense of an integral role for Nonwhites that Terrence bases upon their embodied knowledge of race and racism, he feels that the success of his or any such work done by Blacks depends on Whites’ desire to see change:

**Terrence:** But as a person who works in antiracism, when I look at the change that I’ve been able to make in a year, and the speed at which those changes were made, it’s really mind-boggling that any system could react that fast to a problem that the system itself identified. Because they went to get me, I didn’t come and solicit them. They wanted to change their system.

and upon their support for change:
Terrence: I have a belief that at every level of the organization you tend to have about twenty percent of white males who understand it. They understand that there are things that are wrong. They may not understand how to solve it, but they understand that there are things that are wrong. And if you can find a way to mobilize them, they become the change agents.

Thus, Terrence feels that these white men need people of Colour to direct the change process, but then, that these people of Colour subsequently need to identify the contingent of white men who can be persuaded to exercise their power and influence over other white men. Terrence, therefore, sees himself in terms of the power he does not have, saying:

Terrence: I don’t have the money. I cannot hire. I cannot fire. I cannot promote.

His sense of agency is completely erased, and it is only when he has white support that his sense of agency comes into play:

Terrence: When Sam Majors or Dean Kerry [his white colleagues] goes in front of the 45 visible minorities [in the organization], I’m not asking Dean to say, “I sympathize with you.” I’m not asking Dean to say, “Well this is how you can make yourself more available for executive positions.” What I’m asking Dean to say is that we have set a goal that in a few years we want to increase the number of visible minorities. What I’m asking Dean to say is that we’re gonna be putting a lot of money aside for particular programs. What I’m asking him to say is that on this recommendation, we’re gonna be spending a large amount of money on internship and on vocational activities. All I’m asking him to say is a commitment, not only to get to the end state of representation, but providing the resource to get to that end state. So when Dean goes, then, into what I would call his community of reference, I’m asking him to do the same. I’m asking him to say to Caucasian males, “We must change. It’s going to be in your agenda, in your accountability to change. I’m going to allow a percentage of your bonus in terms of the changes that you’re gonna make.” That’s what I need from him. … I have the resources. I have the dollars. I can move the file forward.

He says this with no sense of irony about this powerlessness even in his role as a corporate executive, and makes no connections to how racial equity may be playing out in his own situation—either because he is a Black man or because he is a racial equity
Terrence is so committed to the idea of white power and his powerlessness that in his racial equity work that he acts from this subordinate position:

**Terrence:** How do you mobilize the power structure? By affecting resources. And us [Nonwhites], it’s to convince, it’s to cajole, it’s sometimes to profile, it’s sometimes to beg. In my job in antiracism, there is no low that I’m not gonna go to to get one visible minority hired.

and even when he feels he is exercising agency, he puts a lot of effort into disguising and undermining that agency while making room for Whites to have an exaggerated sense of their agency. He says:

**Terrence:** So in any structure where one is powered, and one is somewhat powerless, you have to adapt a behaviour that somehow allows that to continue. … My biggest asset in the organization is to get people to do things, and for people to believe that it was their idea. They had the thought, and I’m executing on their behalf. I never take credit. Technically speaking, I don’t do anything. Everybody else does. I want everybody else to be rewarded. But I cannot appear that I am in control. There may come a time when if we build enough of a base that the power relationship will shift, but in terms of seeking the ally, I have to get the ally to believe—skillfully, not playing to them, not playing down, not cowering, not showing that I’m stupid, because the day I do that they’re gonna bounce me out [Right]—but I need to walk a fine line where I must get people to do things, but they do it thinking that it was their ideas.

This position seems to contradict his feeling that Blacks are integral to racial equity work, and that Whites need to depend on Black knowledge. So I asked him about that:

**Philip:** And in the context of what we’re talking about, what are the risks around that? Because, again, you have a white person coming out with the impression that, you know, “Well. This was my idea. This was my initiative. I’ve got it! I know antiracism! I do it well!”

**Terrence:** I don’t get them to believe that. I don’t get them to believe that they know antiracism, that they do it well. I get them to believe that they put fifty thousand dollars towards hiring five [Black] kids. I get them to believe that they’re gonna spend two hundred thousand to hold a leadership summit for Black executives. I get them to believe that they can run a special leadership academy for four hundred and fifty thousand dollars for potential Black executives, and then they’re happy about it. They go to bed; they sleep well because they feel like they contributed to a cause.
Terrence is not unaware that his modus operandi is related to his lack of connectedness to a Black/nonwhite community. He says:

**Terrence:** I am alone. I don’t have any anchor. There’s not another Black person at my level that I can go to. My boss is not Black. My boss’s boss is not Black. My boss’s, boss’s boss is not Black. So how do I get a white person to decide, “I’m gonna spend $50 000 to hire 5 Black interns? That’s the challenge. So as a person who would take $50 000 and hire a cousin, a friend, or spending it on buying a table for an event, I’m gonna do this with it. So my job is understanding how to get the person to do without the person knowing that I’m telling them to do it.

This is exactly the prediction that Ajani or Keith might make, for Terrence has been recruited and promoted by Whites, disconnected from his community, and he works in isolation without community input.

In summary, then, because Terrence feels that the support of white power is indispensable in his work, he navigates the contradictions of racial equity collaborations by undermining his role, and almost erasing himself and his agency. This strategy effectively resolves the tensions of the collaboration in favour of white power and agency and at the expense of Black agency. In fairness, it should be mentioned that though Terrence seems to be fostering a missionary mentality in Whites, and though it seems that he is bringing Blacks to the organization on terms that undermine true racial equity, it cannot be denied that he does achieve some success in bringing about change within the corporate environment, though it is superficial in the same way that I have argued all interest convergence endeavours are (see Section 7.4.4). Yet, in getting Blacks and other visible minorities hired and promoted within the organization, they have gotten a foot in the door and at least ultimately have the opportunity to choose their own terms for navigating the racial climate within the corporation. Arguably, then, a form of racial progress has been achieved.
8.3.9 *Imani: Be Manipulative. It's OK!*

As we have seen (Section 7.4.2), Imani sees herself as having fallen into racial equity work out of a sense of the need to demand human rights where they are being denied. She says:

*Imani:* There was a need. There was a need to speak out about things that are unfair, that are inappropriate; behaviours that don’t coincide with the constitution, which don’t coincide with our rights as workers, our rights as people, as citizens. … It just happened out of a sense of—, out of the demand for your rights and a demand for your dignity, and out of a sense of *outrage* that there are institutions and processes and people who oppose it. That’s how you end up here.

It is evident from the beginning of Imani’s interview that a large part of the way that Imani does her racial equity work is by speaking up and speaking out against racial injustice and inequity. She describes herself as outspoken even within the context of unequal power relationships and potential reprisals. She says:

*Imani:* And I knew the more outspoken I was, polite though it was—(that’s the worst kind as far as they’re concerned, ’cause then they can’t yell and scream at you, especially when you put it in terms of a question). I knew they weren’t going to promote me to supervisory officer. I mean they could hardly stand me as school principal. It was like—{laugh}. … And the director said I was far too, too, ahm, what’s the word he used? Oh! He said I was patronizing because I was too erudite. I heard that, I went to him and I said, “I beg your pardon?”

Even when she is being accused for her speaking up, she talks back to power. However, Imani is quite aware of the risks of speaking up in this manner, and describes this as she explains why she has been doing racial equity work for so long:

*Imani:* I’m still here, even though I say, “I’m older. There are younger voices than mine. They must get sick of hearing me,” you know, “and I’ll get out of the picture and let somebody else take over.” Well what happens to some of the younger voices is that they have to pay mortgages. They have to pay school fees. They have to build a career. They *know* that if they open their mouths too much about certain issues, there are those who have found themselves smacked into a corner, and so it’s a very easy thing for them to learn. Self-protection. And they should because they do have families, and they help in other ways but, you know,
that leaves some of us who are long in the tooth out there still doing, I guess, what you have called equity work.

She is very aware of the risks of doing racial equity work and continues to do it because the risks for her at her stage in life are less than those for others.

Imani brings these understandings to her collaborative work and relationships. We have seen in Section 8.2 that she is willing to negotiate in these relationships, and to compromise when this is possible without undermining the work. However, there are other occasions where the disagreement with the white colleague threatens to undermine the work. Where this is the case, and particularly where the relationships are fraught with power imbalances, this must be done carefully. However, Imani is not reluctant to be shrewd, crafty and manipulative, and this is how she exercises her agency within the context of racial equity collaborations.

Imani: Find out where the blocks are! Find a way around, under them! Be manipulative! It’s OK! It’s OK!

Imani shares how, where necessary, she cunningly strategizes around the collaborative relationships with a view toward getting the racial equity work done.

Imani: I mean, let me not lie to you, one of the most important things for survival is being manipulative. Oh-ho-ho yes! We can’t win this one straight on. Don’t even try! You know, when you say, “Cheez. This roadblock is here, and it’s constantly here, and he’s it. How do we get rid of him? How do we do that? You can’t get rid of him? OK. How do we give him something else to do while we’re doing—?” You know, something else that he’s not going to realize is—. You know, something else important, but not—. Whatever! [You might say] “You work out the framework and we’ll fit this workshop that we’re planning into that framework.” Now he might not even recognize the framework when you’re through with it, but that’s OK. {long pause} I mean, you’ve gotta survive! You have to do the work!

Rather than leave the relationship altogether, or speak up in ways that will be counter-productive for the racial equity project, Imani uses what she describes as manipulation to
ensure that the work will continue where the collaborative relationships threaten to
undermine it. In this manner, she carves out the space to pursue the work in the way that
she feels it needs to be done without unduly disrupting the collaborative relationship and
reaping the negative consequences that come for doing so. She does not want to be
disrespectful, but taking the “Don’t sell out!” approach described in Section 8.2.3 she
holds the racial equity work as the highest priority:

Imani: I’m not talking bout deceitfully trying to stab someone in the back. I’m
trying to give them meaningful opportunity and work and diversion while you get
what you have to do done without demeaning them, without lessening them, but
finding some very respectable appropriate way to move them out of the way. It
requires some thinking. You could also look at it in a different way. You could
look at it as being complementary to them because you’ve given them something
to do that is worthy of their talent and of their status, whatever the hell it is, and
an opportunity not to butt heads with you.

While there yet seems to be a tongue-in-cheek aspect to this statement of respect, it is still
clear that in contrast to others who may more quickly pull out of the collaborative
relationship or refuse to engage in the first place, and in contrast to those who take stands
and face the consequences head on, Imani seems to take more pause and uses
manipulation to avoid disrupting the relationship (and therefore the racial equity work)
where it is not necessary.

Imani: they do have the power to get rid of you if they’re not comfortable. I’ve
been there. … But I mean, you have to decide. I mean you’re not going out there
to slap people in the head by rudeness and offensiveness, but nor are you there to
shuffle. I find that’s very often done, you know. I mean, it’s ridiculous. So you
just have to find a way around it.

However, Imani’s commitment to the work, the “Don’t Sell Out” attitude, and the refusal
to “shuffle” suggest that where this manipulation will not work, or where it is required
that she speak up for the work’s sake, Imani’s outspokenness will come into play and she
speaks out despite the risks.
8.3.10 Beverly and Resisting Placism

Beverly’s is another of the interviews in which we did not have the opportunity to explore a great deal of her background information. However, we see that Beverly is aware of and notices systemic racism speaking. For example, Beverly speaks about the marginalization of Black students within education, and understands the structural source and implications of it, as she explains in the following excerpt where she uses the notion of subtlety to refer to the systemic dimensions of racism:

Beverly: Now when it comes to subtleties, when I walk around the school and I see chiefly Black students in college level courses and special education classes and the rest of it, for me that’s subtle. That is subtle! And when I look at their marks, their English marks—even for kids who are born in this country, Black kids who are born in this country—for me that is very subtle, and that is systemic, and it’s very subtle. Systemic racism is very subtle because it’s so engrained in the system that because kids are Black, there is that feeling that they don’t speak English, and so their English mark is going to be poor. And the reality is that it is far-reaching, because English is one of the subjects that you can’t go any place without it. And so many of these kids get left behind and end up in places where they did not intend to be because of their, you know, of the whole systemic stuff that’s happening.

In spite of her structural understanding of racial inequity and the barriers it imposes, Beverly’s sense of agency is often expressed through her resistance to a much more easily resisted form of racism—that is, the placism aspect of racial inequity or the notion that some people do/do not belong in certain places. She relates an incident that shows her resistance to placism:

Beverly: sometimes they’ll ask you the question like, ahm, it’s as much as, “Do you feel comfortable?”, or they become too patronizing to make it feel as if you’re not comfortable. I’ll give you an example. I remember going out to Victoria Island. I had gone out as a delegate [on one of the community boards she worked on], and the spouses were there as well. So one morning, I decided I was going to go join the spouses for breakfast. And I got there and one of the spouses went to me, “I don’t know how you do it” And I said, “Do what?”
And she said, “You know, like how you’re the only Black person and you—,” you know.
And I said, “Am I not supposed to be here?”
And she said, “Yes.”
And I said, “Well that’s the only criteria that I need to interact with or be involved in whatever is going on,” So it’s very interesting, because that person had internalized the fact that I was the only Black person there, and she was thinking that I might feel a way.” So sometimes people don’t understand that when you’re standing on your own two feet, you have as much right, you have everything to make you interact, you know. And I think that’s one of the things that as minorities, sometimes, we lack the courage to venture into areas where people think that you could not venture.

Beverly believes that Blacks should not allow themselves to be made to feel out of place in those spaces in which they have every right to occupy. This is similar to Maryam’s notion of “fill[ing] up the space of your body. In other words, while she focuses her work against structurally imposed barriers that cannot be simply be transcended at will, Beverly feels that Blacks should not allow their discomfort, or others’ suggestions that they are out of place, to keep them from taking full advantage of whatever privilege the society affords them. Beverly seems to manage the discussion of these two aspects of racial inequity—structural racism and placism—by using different terms. She speaks of “barriers” and “boundaries.” While there are structural barriers that Blacks face and need to resist though they are more difficult to challenge, Blacks should exercise their agency to transcend boundaries that are imposed by “placism” and social perceptions about who is able to be where and do what. Resistance to placism as she challenges racism has been her own story. She says:

**Beverly:** Well, you see, my basic feeling is that I have had no boundaries in my own personal life. I’ve had no boundaries at all in what kind of work I can do, where I can go, who I can talk with, and the rest of it.

In the context of her entire interview, this does not represent a notion that racism operates simply on the interpersonal level, and that if Blacks experience racism, it is simply
because they have allowed themselves to be marginalized. Instead, Beverly’s roaming without boundaries set up by placism represent one form of her resistance to the more intractable barriers of racism. She feels Blacks should exercise this same agency and resistance by making themselves comfortable/included wherever they have the right to be.

Beverly’s disdain for boundaries and placism, then, gives rise to one of the ways that she negotiates the contradictions of racial equity collaborations. Beverly’s expectation of her white colleagues within racial equity collaborations is that they also challenge the barriers of racial inequity and the exercise of oppressive white power by undermining the boundaries imposed by their white privilege and the patterns of white association with people of Colour. Bonilla-Silva and his colleagues (2003b; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006) have shown that while Whites in the United States claim to value an “interracial lifestyle” (2003b, p. 104)—that is, one where they interact socially with Nonwhites—their actual lifestyles and patterns of interaction are much more segregated. This gives rise to a “white habitus” (2003b, p. 104; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006), “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates Whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (2003b, p. 104). In Beverly’s opinion, and consistent with Bonilla-Silva’s research, white habitus can be challenged when Whites also transcend the usual boundaries of their social interaction to interact with Nonwhites in situations where Whites are not assumed dominant. This requires that Whites put themselves into situations where they are in the minority, where they might experience discomfort. Beverly feels it is imperative that white racial equity workers get out of their comfort zones and interact with people of
Beverly therefore uses her agency to facilitate moving Whites beyond their boundaries as part of the conditions under which she will collaborate. When asked what she looks for in a white ally, she says:

**Beverly:** Does the person have the knowledge base to do antiracist work? And is the person *willing* to get that knowledge base to do antiracist work? And if that person is willing to get the knowledge base, then one of the things that I would be doing is that person and myself would be going to different places, interacting with different people. You know it’s no different from me going many places and I am the only Black person there. Is the person willing to be the only white person in many settings? Because this is something that many white people are not prepared to find themselves engrossed in another culture, because it’s so uncomfortable. And they cannot afford that discomfort. So are they—? Because you have to get out there, you have to get to know people, to get that comfort level that you need to do antiracist work, right? So is that person willing to risk going out there?

As we have already seen (Section 4.3), Beverly made sure that her white colleague, Sheila, travelled with her to the West Indies, thus undermining any white habitus she may have had. Beverly speaks often about this kind of interracial social interaction and her expectation that her white colleagues engage in it, and this is a prominent manifestation of Beverly’s resistance to the contradictions within racial equity collaborations.

I also note that, Beverly, like some of the other participants, takes a pedagogical approach to her racial equity work and her collaborative relationships in this work. She says:

**Beverly:** You know, I make no bones about—. When I see racism, I call it what it is. I am not going to tell someone that they are racist, because, as I say it’s how you do things sometimes. But I will explain to people and have them understand why what they said or what they did is inappropriate, and how it affects the other person, and why it affects the person, because it borders on race or whatever it is. But I think that it is important that when you see something that’s not right, that you call it what it is. And instead of accusing the person, you educate the person.

Even with her insistence that her white colleagues interact with other people of Colour in situations where they will be outnumbered, Beverly is often present as the guide through
these situations in order to ensure that her colleagues learn what they need to learn. Thus, the teaching approach frames Beverly’s resistance to the contradictions of her racial equity collaborations. As she challenges placism and expects her white colleagues to challenge their own sense of place by interacting with Nonwhites on equal terms, she hopes by this means to help to develop white colleagues who are less prone to the pitfalls of whiteness in these collaborations.

8.4 Towards a Critical Race Africology of Black Resistance in Racial Equity Collaborations

In the foregoing sections, we have seen that there is a wide variety of resistance strategies that the participants in this study use to navigate the contradictions of their racial equity collaboration with Whites. These range from Terrence’s extreme undermining of Black agency to Ajani’s well-developed African-centeredness; from Sharon’s tendency to leave the arena to Diane’s willingness to take stands but face the dire negative consequences; from Imani’s strategies of manipulation to Keith’s strong reliance on Black community support. This section represents a preliminary analysis of these strategies with a view toward understanding (without engaging in oversimplification) how these varied strategies and the participants’ reasons for choosing them are related not only to their personal choice, but also to the the circumstances within which they do their work and the broader dynamics of race, gender, and class in their lives.

To begin, it is important to recall the diverse contexts in which the participants do their racial equity work. The men in this study either work at executive levels in their
jobs (James and Terrence) or work in blue collar or service sector contexts (Ajani and Keith). Quincy is a former academic and is presently an elected public servant. All the women in the study are (or were) educators, whether in the youth or tertiary sector. Two are academics (Diane and Sharon) and the others have held positions as school principals (Beverly and Imani), which in the education sector are equivalent to middle management positions. Maryam, who has also been a teacher, is the only executive among the women.

Though the participants in this study are by no means a representative sample of Blacks in Canada, as one looks at the employment positions of the participants, one can recognize some of the very familiar ways that gender organizes the world of work. Most of the women are in the education profession, yet even in this arguably feminized profession (at least in the youth sector) none have attained unto senior management levels. Maryam, who is no longer a teacher, works at the executive level in government and is the only woman at this level in her profession. The glass ceiling for women, and particularly for Black women, is evidenced here. As can be expected, more of the Black men (two) have attained executive status. The other men work in service and skilled-labour jobs. Unfortunately, this sample does not represent the many Black women who are unemployed or who have service sector jobs.

It is also important to keep in mind the ways that gendered narratives of race structure social existence. Particularly in circumstances such as those discussed in this study—that is contexts where Blacks collaborate with Whites—there is a constant dynamic interplay and engagement in these relationships with the discursive (social and
media) narratives of race, both dominant and oppositional, that are constitutive of and constituted by material relations of race.

Pulling these contextual and broader social dynamics together, then, it is interesting to note that the two men whose resistance strategies depend mostly upon the support of the Black community are those men who work in the skilled-labour and service sectors, and whose racial equity work, for the most part, takes place outside of their places of employment. Ajani speaks strongly about his Afrocentric identity and his right to occasionally demand exclusive Black space for his racial equity work, while Keith speaks about resolutely resisting the appeal of promotion that he might receive from his white racial equity colleagues if he is not absolutely sure that he is backed by the Black community and that he speaks with their voice. These strategies of resistance contrast quite sharply with those of Terrence and James who work at the executive level and whose racial equity work is their employment. Terence disguises and undermines his own agency in order to court white power, while James speaks daringly, but is in actuality quite limited by the contradictions of embodying white power as he stands in a racial equity role.

I read these differences in resistance strategies against the easily accessible narratives about Black men that would impinge upon their lives and the way they negotiate the contradictions of racial equity collaborations. Black men have long been portrayed, particularly by the media, as angry, aggressive, violent, and threatening. It is hardly necessary to take the time to substantiate this claim that is now axiomatic among race scholars, and is so very evident in just a cursory sampling of media. We witness, for example, the pervasive portrayals of Black men as gangsters and hoodlums on (white-
owned) Black Entertainment Television and in video games, the recurrent portrayal of United States presidential candidate Barack Obama as a threat to American security, and recent portrayals of Black men and their communities in Greater Toronto Area media as inherently violent, deviant and dangerous. Studies have suggested that the understanding of Black men as a threat is entrenched in the mainstream psyche (Trawalter, Todd, Baird, & Richeson, 2008), and that these stereotypes are used as justification for the extent to which Black men are embraced or not by Whites (Page, 1997).

I suggest, then, that this view of Black men might have a great deal to do with how their resistance to racial inequity might be received and understood by Whites, and therefore with the strategies of resistance they engage in within their collaborative relationships with Whites. Indeed, Terrence is aware of these stereotypes and his own juxtaposition against them in the eyes of Whites. We see this as he tells of one workshop he facilitated:

Terrence: So, the exercise calls for putting people in a situation where they are very at ease, and I ask them stereotypes about different groups. And believe you me, all negative! Some of the worst images you’re ever gonna hear. So that’s a way, non-threatening way of getting people to realize how much stereotypes they carry, and how much stereotypes the language that they speak and how it may have an impact on their interaction with other people. So usually I start with Blacks—I’m talking about highly educated people. And I say to them, “OK. What are your stereotypes about Blacks?”

“Thieves. Baby mammadrammas. Drug dealers. Pimps. Rap music.” [These are] highly educated people! And they’re saying that, and they’re looking at me who is a Black man that they know doesn’t match anything that they stereotype.

In the context of racial equity work, it is also useful to keep in mind the way that the approaches of two notable racial equity workers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., have been dichotomized in mainstream discourse. Martin Luther King Jr. is often portrayed as the “good,” level-headed, admirable leader—particularly because of his
commitment to extreme non-violence. On the other hand, Malcolm X is often portrayed as the “bad,” rabid hater of Whites—despite his recanting of his earlier more extreme stances toward the end of his life. His words “by any means necessary” are often taken out of context and juxtaposed against a photograph of him holding a firearm that functions to portray him as irrationally violent, though he never did employ violence and was often the object of violence. Interestingly, in their time, the ideas of both men were considered threatening, and both men had an understanding of the way their own work complemented the other’s. Nevertheless, as with the stereotypes and narratives of Black men discussed above, the dichotomy constructed between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. is useful for doing a particular kind of dominant work that polices Black resistance and attempts to domesticate it. That this dichotomy is salient to the men in my study, and may present a context within which they are forced into choosing between the poles is evidenced in the following quote from Keith:

**Keith:** And if I understand a little bit about the Black Panther movement back in the days, you had those leaders who took a different view on how they were gonna achieve certain things. … So there are completely different views at the same time of the struggle. Like which one do we choose, or which one do you choose, depending on how you’re looking at society, right? The Black Panthers … their idea of moving Black issues forward was on a more aggressive pattern. … [while] you have the Martin Luthers and those guys taking a different path to accomplish equality for Blacks also. And they did. So it depends on which side of the spectrum you are on.

It makes sense, then, with respect to this stereotype of Black man as threat and the dichotomy constructed around approaches to racial equity work, that Ajani and Keith, who engage in their racial equity work outside of the work environment, have more space to identify more strongly with the demands of the community, and choose to be more resistant to the allure of white power than the other men. The context of their racial
 equity work makes their resistance much less of a perceived threat to white power than it might be within a multiracial work context. They can also engage in these strategies with little or no concern about their impact upon their employment. Further, they are keenly aware that any power they have in their work is afforded to them by their relationship to their communities rather than their relationship to Whites. Quentin, who is now an elected representative, can also afford to identify more strongly with the Black community that he represents, and engage in more pointed resistance to whiteness without fear of substantial reprisal.

However, Terrence and James do their work in a context where their power is afforded to them by their affiliation with white power. Being perceived as too much of a threat to white power and privilege could easily result in their losing their employment or otherwise encountering significant career barriers. Not surprisingly, then, we see that their resistance strategies are much more attenuated. Terrence strives to make it seem as though he is not leading change, while James appears to be a lot more bark than bite. It is important to note, however, that these strategies of navigating the perilous contradictions of working with Whites in racial equity work do not take them to the limits of failing to stand up, name, and call racism as necessary. Earlier discussions show that both James and Terrence will challenge their white colleagues as necessary in the course of their work (see Section 6.3.2).

The women grapple with a host of other historical gendered and raced narratives. These are the “mammy” narrative—portraying Black women as asexual, non-threatening, self-sacrificial caregivers (most often of Whites at the expense of their own families); the overtly sexualized “Jezebel” narrative—portraying Black women as sexually wanton and
irresponsible, and a threat to white women and family (white and Black); and the more recent “Sapphire” image—portraying Black women as contentious, loud, and emasculators of Black men (see Hudson, 1998). As with the narratives of Black men discussed above, these narratives of Black women also serve their domesticating function and police resistance against inequity (Collins, 2000, p. 69). Citing Gilkes, Collins writes:

Black women's assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality have been a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo. As punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images. (p. 69)

Collins also writes:

As part of a generalized ideology of domination, stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning … Hazel Carby suggests that the objective of stereotypes is “not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations” (1987, 22). These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life. (p. 69)

In the context of the racial equity collaborations that are the subject of this study, the “mammy” image appears to be the most salient. The dependence of the Sapphire image upon the presence of the Black male (Hudson, 1998, pp. 246-247), and the predominant sexualized dimension of the Jezebel image do not seem to justify their application to the context of Black-white racial equity collaborations. Further, the “mammy” image was conceived to minimize the threat of the Black female body which is otherwise conceived within the other narratives—particularly the “Jezebel” narrative (Hudson, 1998, p. 243) as threat. Hudson (1998) describes the mammy image as follows:

… the Mammy icon embodies and exemplifies many attractive qualities. She is friend, advisor, surrogate mistress of the manor, and mother; she possesses the virtues of a valued domestic servant: faithfulness, obsequiousness, and
acquiescence. In addition to her calming and nonthreatening psychological attributes, Mammy’s physical presentation is also nonthreatening. (p. 244) … the action in their lives centers around providing advice and help, often at their own expense, to the children and teens they help to raise. (p. 245)

Citing Jewell, she writes:

She is portrayed as an obese African American woman, of dark complexion, with extremely large breasts and buttocks and shining white teeth visibly displayed in a grin. (Jewell in Hudson, 1998, p. 245).

To say that Black women grapple with the mammy stereotype in their collaborative work with Whites is not to suggest that their racial equity work is not considered threatening to Whites and their interests. Indeed, we have seen (particularly in Sections 7.4.3 and 8.3.4) that the women in this study face risks in response to their racial equity work that are as significant as those faced by the men. What I am saying, however, is that there exists a well-developed and self-deceptive historical narrative that North American white supremacist society has developed that allows it to manage and mitigate the perceived risks that Black women present to the status quo, and that this narrative still has great currency in contemporary North American societies. Black narratives, and particularly Black women’s narratives, have articulated the ways in which trusted Black house servants, most often women, were often anything but acquiescent to the interests of Whites, and used their trusted positions to advance the cause of Black liberation (see, e.g., hooks, 1992b). While, historically, there have been corresponding narratives about Black men—that is, the Uncle Tom or the buffoon, these narratives appear to have less currency in contemporary times in the context of the easily accessible narratives of criminality of Black men—though it could be argued that Terrence’s strategies engage to some extent with the Uncle Tom narrative despite his personal resistance of it.
That the women in the study grapple with the implications of the mammy image for their work is borne out by the fact that two of them explicitly mention it in their interview, though they have quite different responses to it. As we have seen, Diane says:

**Diane:** I guess the down side to that is that—and I think if you talk to a lot of Black people, they’ll probably tell you this—is that when that happens and there are consequences to the white person—they’re being retaliated against, or they’ve lost some of the privilege of being white as a result of doing that—then you have to do the nurturing. You know, it’s expected that you’re going to hold their hand and commiserate about how terrible this is when that little episode is a very small part of their privileged life, and we live that every day. So, in some senses I resent it, but I recognize the value of having to do it. But we have always, I think, always been nurturers as a people.

and Sharon says:

**Sharon:** So now I’m expected to like, “Oh really! Tell me what happened,” and, you know, “what sorts of things did you guys encounter?” and, you know, “how horrible it was for you.” I’m not going down that road.

So, when she realized that I was just sitting there looking at her, and the rest of the class was waiting for me to say something, and she realized I wasn’t gonna go down that road, she said, “Oh!” you know, “I, I, I didn’t—,” she got all flustered and everything. “Oh, you know, I don’t mean to get personal or anything like that. I just wanted to say that, you know, like this is how—.”

And I’m like {sarcastically} “Yah” and on we go. This is a [university] course. We’re gonna keep this on the level of theory, and we’re gonna do some interrogation. I’m not gonna go down this personal road with you. And I see white women wanting to do that all the time, and wanting to put me in the role of caregiver, and I’m very resistant to that. “I’m not your mammy. Not your friend. You know, I don’t even have the body type to be a mammy, so we’re not going this route {both laugh}.

It is within the context of this “mammy” narrative that exists to manage the perceived threat of Black women’s resistance and whereby Whites are able to understand these women (correctly or incorrectly) as less of a threat than Black men that I note that the narratives of the women in the study seem to be more critical, and their resistance strategies somewhat more bold and forthright and less apologetic than the men, who seem to be a lot more cautious. All the women in the study are extremely outspoken in their
approach. Maryam, though she works at the executive level like James and Terrence, is able to be “open, honest, and direct,” even winning over those with whom she disagrees through this strategy. It may be that the men perceive a somewhat greater risk of punitive retaliation if they are perceived as oppositional. They are very familiar with the stereotype of the “angry Black man.”

The nurturing, mothering aspects of the mammy stereotype may also converge with the climate of expectations set by these women’s professional roles as educators. This convergence may be a significant factor in the choices that some of these women (Beverly, Diane, and Maryam) make by assuming a teaching approach in their work, and in understanding that approach as important. All three of these women see this as a necessary part of their role as Black racial equity workers. However, as we have seen in their individual resistance strategies, none of these women allow their willingness to teach to stop them from taking clear stands against racial inequity and injustice as they need to, and we have seen that Diane faces these situations head-on with little regard to the consequences.

The other two women are equally forthright in their resistance, but less hopeful about the value of teaching and nurturing. Imani sees the teaching aspect of the work as serving to justify the racist status quo and draw attention away from the simple fact that there is little social will to challenge racial inequity (see Section 6.3.2). However, she still teaches with the faint hope that there really are those who need to be enlightened and for whom a teaching approach will make a difference. Further, without by any means suggesting that Imani puts herself in a subservient position analogous to that of a house servant, her strategy of covert manipulation might be compared to those strategies
historically used by house servants to subvert racial inequity under the noses of the unsuspecting members of the white household. These have historically been quite successful ways of finding agency and enacting resistance within the confines set up by white supremacy, and have turned the white supremacist assumptions about Blacks working within these conditions to the advantage of the struggle for Black liberation (see hooks, 1992b; Roediger, 1998b, pp. 4-5).

As we have seen above, Sharon altogether rejects the mammy image along with its teaching and nurturing role. She expects that her white colleagues will do their own “homework” of interrogating their privilege and developing a critical race approach, without depending on her to teach it to them. As a consequence, she is known to pull out of the kinds of disrespectful situations in which she is expected to play this nurturing role, or where she is required to forego her own interests in order to understand, nurture, and teach Whites at the expense of her dignity.

I suggest, then, that the resistance strategies discussed in this chapter, and how the participants choose and deploy them can be understood in the context of the specific conditions under which they do their racial equity work as well as the broad, easily accessible racist narratives within which Black bodies are taken up.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the collective and individual ways in which the participants in the study resistance and negotiate the contradictions of their racial equity collaborations. Collectively, the participants recognize the value of Black community support and the imperative to stick to their purpose without abandoning it when the going gets tough or in the face of pushback from their white colleagues. Individually, the
participants engage in diverse micro-sociological strategies as they negotiate these contradictory relationships.

The readily accessible and well-rehearsed gendered narratives of anti-Black racism that circulate in white supremacist society seem to provide some preliminary insights into the ways that the study participants negotiate the contradictions of the racial equity collaborations in which they do their racial equity work. However, it cannot be said that these narratives pre-determine the resistance strategies of the participants. That would be to effectively negate the participants’ agency. Instead, it seems that these narratives, the job positions of the participants in the study, and the strategies of resistance they engage in seem to interact dialogically and are somewhat mutually constitutive of each other.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS: WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

9.1 Summary

This project has sought to respond to the significant scarcity in the research literature of critical work on whiteness which centers the perspectives, agency and voice of Nonwhites, and in particular, Blacks. The paucity of literature of this nature both suggests the lack of appreciation for the importance of this perspective when researching the phenomenon of racial dominance, as well as raises questions about the manner in which racial equity work is approached by those Whites who do work that is intended to advance racial equity. This study has responded to this knowledge deficit and these questions in two ways:

a. it has centred the Black voice, specifically and intentionally seeking the perspectives of Blacks

b. it has set as its research site the context of collaborations between Blacks and Whites in racial equity work.

This research has explored many issues that are not addressed or only superficially addressed in previous studies, and has developed deeper insights about white racial equity workers and the work they do in collaboration with Blacks. The primary concern of the existing work on whiteness in racial equity work seems to be with the identity of the white racial equity worker (or antiracist) and how it is developed and maintained. There is also the implicit assumption that the involvement of Whites in racial equity work is always a good thing, with little attention to the pitfalls of this involvement.
This research study has suggested that Black racial equity workers do indeed feel that white racial equity work is important in that the task of challenging racial inequity should not be left only to Nonwhites. Further, they identify certain strategic reasons for involving Whites in racial equity work—reasons that arise because of the racially inequitable social context that generates the need for this work in the first place. The Black racial equity workers see value in positioning Whites to say and do things that they feel will not be as readily accepted if they are said or done by Blacks. However, they also hold deep convictions that Black voices are important in racial equity work. This study has thoroughly dealt with the participants’ understanding of Blacks’ embodied epistemologies and their importance in racial equity work.

The participants in this study also indicate that the salience of Black embodied knowledge in racial equity work and the strategic use of whiteness to achieve racial equity ends—particularly those ends that only require the white body because of its privileged position in a white supremacist context—pull in opposite directions giving rise to a number of contradictions that can and do arise in racial equity collaborations between Blacks and Whites. For this reason, the participants refer to these collaborations as a double-edged sword. This research has discussed the paradoxical ways in which Whites may use racial equity work to make and know themselves as superior, transcendent white subjects. It has also discussed the effects of the intrusion into white racial equity work of abstract liberalism, the mainstream ideological position held by a majority of Whites (and many Nonwhites) while the Black racial equity workers in this study approach their work through quite different frames. The final contradiction this study addresses is that whereby Whites benefit from racial equity work at the expense of Blacks, appropriate
their resistance discourses, and/or organize advantages for themselves from their association with Blacks. The research also argues that these contradictions are exacerbated where Whites are found in leadership roles over Blacks in these collaborations.

This thesis then goes on to flesh out a politics of engagement for these cross-racial collaborations between Blacks and Whites for racial equity. It starts with a discussion of the epistemology of ignorance that attends the white body, and which produces a white embodied knowledge of race and racism. It then constructs a grounded theory of the epistemological and the ethical/moral terms that the Black racial equity workers want their white colleagues to attend to in their collaborative work, and thus develops an ontology of whiteness in the context of racial equity work. It advances an epistemology of unknowing that is the only approach with any hope of undermining the epistemology of ignorance that attends the white body. Such an approach complicates the antiracist white identity, challenging the notion that it is arrived at simply by acquiring a particular set of competencies or grasping certain facts. It emphasizes the limitations that are structurally imposed upon the white body seeking to adopt an antiracist identity, arguing that this is not a finite process. This understanding of the white antiracist identity avoids ever positioning the white body as authority or expert in racial equity work.

Finally, the thesis examines the ways in which the Black racial workers in this study establish their agency and struggle against the contradictory conditions of their collaborative racial equity work with Whites. It argues that their convictions about the importance of Blacks embodied knowledge in racial equity work are, themselves, a form of resistance to these contradictions. The Black racial equity workers emphasize the
importance of maintaining ties with, and the support of, the Black community. They also emphasize the importance of clearly articulating the intended outcomes of the work so as not to buckle to the pressure of whiteness, and in order to have a way of evaluating whether the work is indeed serving the ends of racial equity. The thesis also looks at the individual strategies that the Black racial equity workers use to navigate their collaborative relationships, such as choosing not to collaborate, being centred in their Africanness, and even in some cases erasing their own agency. The thesis connects these to the varying gender and class structures within which the participants work.

9.2 Contrasts and Similarities with Previous Research

Considering these outcomes, it is instructive to consider how these research findings relate to previous research about white racial equity workers, their work, and their collaborations with Blacks in this work.

First, this research agrees with other research as to the conflicted nature of the white antiracist identity and the matter that egalitarian motives are not enough without a thorough interrogation of dominant paradigms for thinking about race and racism. The findings of this research, however, seem to place a great deal more emphasis on the structurally imposed limits upon the white antiracist identity. This is not surprising, particularly where previous research has been done by white researchers, since whiteness and liberal ideologies of race commonly exaggerate the agency of white individuals—particularly with respect to their racial group membership. This study offers a more cautious reading of white agency and ability to resist racialized structures.
Second, and related to the first, this study also agrees with O’Brien’s study of white antiracists as to the need to destabilize good white/bad white dichotomies that allow white antiracists to distance themselves from accountability for their implication in whiteness (O'Brien, 2001; O'Brien, 2003, p. 267). However, this study takes this notion further. The participants’ narratives repeatedly suggest that there is no consistent qualification, experience, or understanding that white racial equity workers have that distinguishes them from the average white subject not engaged in racial equity work (other than the obvious— their involvement in racial equity work). This finding suggests a reason for the phenomenon that puzzles Chubbuck (2004) and Johnson (2002) in their work. Both these researchers found that they were able to come up with only very few nominations when they asked Blacks and other Nonwhites to nominate people for their studies who they felt were effective white antiracists. This identification may be more meaningful for Whites than it is for Nonwhites. Consequently, the discussion in this study, which is drawn from the participants’ narratives, places less emphasis than previous studies on the identity or character of white racial equity workers. Rather than focus upon character transformation, this study places a great deal more emphasis on the behaviour and approaches that white racial equity workers should take to be successful in racial equity work.

This research differs from previous research by conceiving collaborations between Black and white racial equity workers as fraught with contradictions rather than as simply cooperative, mutually beneficial, or even altruistic (on the part of the white subject). These contradictions are related to the difficulty (or impossibility) of neatly separating the white body from white epistemologies and implication in white dominance
despite the best of intentions on the part of the white racial equity worker. It is here that we note again that intentions are not enough, but instead that a sustained politics of humility, tentativeness, and unfinishedness is in order.

This study also differs from previous work in its understanding of the importance and significance of white racial equity workers’ marginalization through other axes of identity such as class, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexuality. While previous research emphasizes the importance of these identifications in bringing Whites to racial equity work, this thesis suggests that these avenues of coming to the work may actually become problematic in the course of doing the work. In the context of racial equity work, while another oppressed identity is important in helping Whites to understand the need to challenge racial inequity, it should not be assumed that these identities confer greater aptitude for doing racial equity work. The thesis argues that one’s experiences of being marginalized along other axes of oppression should not be allowed to distract from the imperative to be mindful of one’s location as racially dominant. In racial equity work, the dominant racial identity is much more salient than any marginal identity along other axes of inequity. This study also argues that it is untenable to imagine that one can overcome the structural limitations imposed on the white body with respect to coming to antiracist consciousness by a progressive liberal process of coming to know. It is, rather, an ongoing, never-finished process of unknowing whiteness.

It is interesting to note that the preoccupation in recent Critical Whiteness Studies work with the ostensible abolition or rearticulation of whiteness is not reflected in the concerns of the participants in this study. Whiteness to them seems to be something that
cannot be easily abolished by the individual white subject, nor is it something that can be rehabilitated or rearticulated by the white subject in order to achieve “a form of white identity that is comfortable with multiculturalism, and with which multiculturalism is comfortable as well” (Newitz & Wray, 1997a, p. 5). Also noticeably absent from the participants’ narratives and understandings is the pre-occupation with white racial identity. This study does not necessarily contradict the psychological literature on white racial identity and white racial identity development (e.g. Helms 1990, Tatum, 1997). Certainly this psychological literature and the findings of this present research may be used together. The psychological literature focuses on describing the psychological stages or “statuses” that a white individual may experience as s/he discovers and grapples with the reality of structural and institutional white racism and their implication in it. It is important information for the consideration of educators and others who attempt to coax individual whites toward critical and responsible stances with respect to race in a racially inequitable society. However, the findings of this research study suggest that this ought not be the most important concern for those, Black or white, who are involved in racial equity work—particularly if they are working in collaboration. This study, then, restores appropriate balance in the specific context of racial equity work. It shifts the primary concern and expenditure of energy and resources from managing the learning, growth, reactions, and resistance of Whites—that is, paradoxically catering to white interests—toward that of ensuring that the racial equity work that is undertaken is successful and that the collaborative relationships are respectful. In the context of racial equity work, these concerns cannot be divorced from those about the racial identity development of Whites, but they are considerably more balanced and appropriate in terms of taking all
players into account and ensuring that the primary objective of racial equity work—that is, progress toward racial equity—is achieved. This objective cannot be subordinated to concerns about white racial identity development.

As a sociological study, this work also points out the salience of confining social structures and advocates for a more realistic view of white agency. White identity only makes sense in the context of structures of white dominance and privilege, since these racial structures were created precisely for the purpose of positioning those with white skin above all others in a racial hierarchy. Whiteness, then, must be constantly struggled against by both Whites and Nonwhites with an ultimate view toward a day when these constructs have no further meaning and significance for determining social power and privilege.\textsuperscript{39} While maintaining hope, we realize that this is a long-term rather than short-term goal, the path to the achievement of which is fraught with the barriers erected by structural conditions and global capitalist, white supremacist interests. Whiteness, then, will continue to be that which is opposed by the racial equity worker, and white identity that seeks to be antiracist will, in this historical context, continue to be vital, but contradictory. The focus of Black racial equity workers is upon strategies for dealing with whiteness both external to and internal to their racial equity collaborations with Whites.

In terms of fresh insights to the literature, this research offers the only articulation of which I am aware of Blacks’ perspectives about racial equity collaborations with Whites. It offers a framework for understanding the simultaneous pitfalls and promise of

\textsuperscript{39} In this, I agree with the position of the CWS white abolitionists (see Ignatiev, 2005, p. 1; Nopper, 2005). I disagree with the promise of the strategies suggested (Ignatiev, 2005, pp. 3-6) and the thinking undergirding these propositions, which again exaggerate white agency and fail to take sufficient account of the salience of white skin in the present historic moment despite one’s antiracist politics.
these collaborations. It also offers a sampling of strategies of resistance to dysfunctional collaborations, and a framework for understanding the sociological and situational factors that impinge upon such decisions. These findings not only address these gaps in the existing literature, but they also provide a practical set of guidelines for those involved in racial equity work. It offers a language and means for Black racial equity workers to assess the potential efficacy of specific collaborations in which they are involved. This can be accomplished by paying attention to the manifestation of the contradictions outlined in Chapter 6. Whites may use the outline of effective, respectful approaches and behaviours for white racial equity workers discussed in Chapter 7 to help them navigate their racial equity collaborations with Blacks and shape them for success. Black racial equity workers can also draw on the discussion of resistance strategies in Chapter 8 to make informed decisions about how they will conduct themselves in racial equity collaborations that are not working well.

9.3 Further Implications of This Research

9.3.1 Implications in the Obama Era

Many scholars involved in race scholarship (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2008; Dei, 2008a; Feagin, 2008; Logan, 2008) have been occupied with the significance of the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States. Many of these concerns have been around the ways in which Obama’s race has caused other Blacks to overlook those of his policies that seem centrist (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2008) or around the way that antiracist and racial equity work might be stymied by claims that Obama’s election represents the
ushering in of a “post-race” era (e.g., Dei, 2008b; Logan, 2008). These are legitimate concerns. However, the issue most relevant to this thesis is the fact that a large number of Whites voted for Obama, and that he could not have been elected on the basis of the Black vote alone. Many of these white voters, no doubt, intelligently voted the issues; many also likely fully engaged their colourblind frames to convince themselves that Obama was not a Black candidate, but a candidate who “just happens to be Black;” but it seems evident that there are many others who are very aware of Obama’s race and feel themselves to have made a deliberate racially progressive statement in voting for him (Walker, 2008). This is mostly a positive phenomenon, but it does make for many who would therefore now consider themselves allies with Blacks for racial equity. In keeping with what this thesis has argued, the contributions of these Whites toward electing Obama was crucial, and the potential for their continued positioning as allies for racial equity is important to consider, but the pitfalls and contradictions should not be overlooked. There is great likelihood that there are and will be many among these white voters who have taken up or will take up the problematic approaches to racial equity discussed in Chapter 6. On the basis of this research study, I anticipate that unless there is a shift in public racial discourse to incorporate some of the cautions and concerns expressed in this thesis about alliances for racial equity, we could face the deepening of rifts between Blacks and Whites and the further stalling of racially progressive agendas. For example, should Obama attempt to implement racially progressive policies, these may well be stymied if his white colleagues begin to enact the patterns of colourblindness and abstract liberalism, avoidance and stalling that I have discussed in Chapter 6.
9.3.2 Some Implications for Education and Pedagogy

It also seems appropriate, given the volume of work on whiteness by scholars in the field of education (e.g., Aveling, 2002, 2004a; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Chubbuck, 2004; Goldstein, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Lawrence, 1997; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Solomon et al., 2005), to draw some conclusions from this study for pedagogy and classroom practice. However, in some ways, any assumption that there will necessarily be pedagogical implications of research of this type betrays the dominant liberal race-relations paradigms whereby race is an essence, and racism is a matter of ignorance and irrationality that can be solved by the imposition of reason. Goldberg has argued that racism is quite a rational phenomenon for Whites if considered in terms of what it accomplishes for the white subject (Goldberg, 1993, p. 120); Mills and others have argued that what we might refer to as white ignorance is actually a particular substantive type of knowledge generated by a particular epistemology suitable to the perpetuation of white dominance (Alcoff, 2007, p. 39; Mills, 2007, p. 26); and Ahmed has argued that white rationality is not the appropriate response to this state of affairs (2004, paras. 38-40). We must, therefore, be extremely modest about the extent to which we can expect classroom-based interventions to overturn the terms of racist society and the extent to which a study such as this will lead to revolutionary new and more effective pedagogical approaches. Further, because of a lack of political will, the state of Antiracism, Afrocentric, and Critical Whiteness research is so far ahead of the state of education in most contemporary North American classrooms that most of the excellent foundational insights already derived from these bodies of work have yet to be taken seriously and need to be implemented before the insights of this thesis, which are built on them, can be
applied. However, despite these caveats, the findings and arguments of this study do indeed have some important implications for education—particularly with respect to embodied knowledge and the terms of equitable engagement in racial equity collaborations. I address these here.

Like racial equity work, education is popularly conceived within dominant liberal and functional paradigms of progress and benevolence. Consequently, while there are many education professionals who do not care at all to challenge traditional Eurocentric approaches to education, and who find little to challenge in current social arrangements, there are many other well-meaning educators who recognize racial inequity and desire to make a difference, but who do this work using the problematic approaches discussed in Chapter 6 of this study. Thus, in a colourblind context where there are often very few expectations around creating equitable learning conditions, many take missionary approaches whereby they understand the work that they do to create equitable access and outcomes for their racially minoritized students as benevolent rescue missions rather than as their duty to students who are oppressed by the very conditions that position the teacher to do the rescuing. Many also consider themselves to be doing racial equity work as long as they are involved in charity efforts to provide aid to developing countries. As this thesis has argued, these approaches are unacceptable and limit the realization of racial equity outcomes. A shift toward frames of accountability and

---

40 Media audiences are fed a steady diet of films that support this missionary approach for white teachers. Films such as Dangerous Minds and the recent Freedom Writers are examples. The white teachers depicted often use “bootstrap” methods that do not present the need to alter structures, and have little to do with connecting students to their own identities and helping them to achieve a critical understanding of their own lives. These films often also include portrayals of nonwhite educators and other nonwhite adults who treat the nonwhite students with disregard. Claims that these films are “based on a true story” obscure the fact that Hollywood seems less interested in the stories of teachers of Colour who achieve success with students of Colour. A notable, but rather dated, exception (in some regards) is Stand and Deliver, also “based on a true story,” in which a Latino teacher achieves extraordinary success with his Latino students, and which also realistically portrays the enormous personal price paid to achieve these results.
responsibility rather than benevolence is in order. Further, while aid work is necessary, it is important that these education professionals understand for themselves, and explain to the students with whom they work, that their foreign aid projects do not qualify as racial equity work unless these projects involve some discussion and laying bare of the historical and ongoing colonial relationships that create economic disparities between Euro-North American countries and other countries.

Closely related is the way that many white educators are happy to live within the “stalling” dynamic whereby they observe Black History and Asian Heritage months, for example, but otherwise minimally challenge the Eurocentricity of curriculum, are not committed to racially diversifying the profession, or shy away from taking bold steps to address the way that current systems disenfranchise unacceptable numbers of students of Colour. Finally, within the current climate where many teachers enter the profession with their sights already set on becoming administrators and supervisory officers, involvement in racial equity initiatives is often self-serving—seen as one more way to garner credentials that will support promotion through the ranks. Unless these educators truly adopt a politics of engagement of the sort advanced in this thesis, and shed the notion of their having done “extra,” then as these self-declared racial equity experts get promoted to decision-making positions they often become hindrances to effective change efforts.

In terms of implications of this thesis, then, on the one hand it offers insight to Blacks and other non-Whites who find themselves attempting to do racial equity work within these less-than-optimal contexts. A great deal of effort is expended and time lost

41 The fairly low expectations of educators and education systems with respect to their implementing truly effective equity principles makes any such work on teachers’ parts seem like going above and beyond the call of duty.
investing hope in alliances with white colleagues that ultimately turn sour or prove counter-productive. The findings of this thesis offer benchmarks whereby Black educators may evaluate the climate they are working in, and, as appropriate, adopt resistance strategies of the sort discussed in Chapter 8.

On the other hand, while I reiterate that little of this problem is easily solved solely by altering approaches to undergraduate or teacher education, there are also some things that can be done here. Based on the discussions in Chapter 7, a large part of re-imagining teacher education and other critical whiteness pedagogy is to engage the deep ethical/moral dimensions involved in doing this work. Other scholars such as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998, 2000) and Rodriguez (1998) address many of the ways in which this pre-emptive education needs to challenge the way that white students understand the world and their identities. However, the focus must shift from notions of creating new white identities and responding to the reactionary behaviour of white students (as in Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000) toward developing a deep understanding of the body and the epistemological issues that attend it in white supremacist context, as well as toward the moral terms of doing this work. I am not overly hopeful about the ability of pedagogical interventions to change the minds of those dominant bodies who are ideologically invested in the inequitable racial status quo. I am, however, hopeful about what such a pedagogy might do for those students who do recognize racial inequity and hope to challenge it. The findings of this research that emphasize the behaviours and approaches that promote effective white racial equity work rather than how one might establish and articulate an oppositional white identity, and an understanding of how the latter type of approaches lead to contradictory and ineffective racial equity work are
particularly salient here. An appropriate pedagogy would assist the White teacher candidate to recognize the contradictions that may present themselves as they do racial equity work, and articulate clearly the essential epistemological and moral elements of respectful racial equity work that promote real and enduring change.

9.4 Directions for Further Research

In investigating Blacks’ perspectives on racial equity collaborations, this study only investigated the perspectives of Blacks living in Canada. Further study might examine the perspectives of Blacks outside of North America, particularly Blacks from the Caribbean and the African continent. It would be interesting to hear the perspectives of these Blacks who live in contexts where Whites are not in a numerical majority—albeit that whiteness still exerts dominance in these contexts. The methodology of the present study could also be broadened to become a critical ethnography whereby, in addition to interviews, the researchers do participant observation and collect artefacts associated with the lives of the participants. This approach (which was not possible for this study given work constraints and timelines) might give us greater insight into the daily manifestations of the contradictions in racial equity collaborations, and into the strategies of the participants’ resistance.

Taking into account the fact that this study was designed to center Blacks’ perspectives and did exactly that, another possible direction for further research would be to investigate the perspectives of other nonwhite groups on collaborating with Whites in racial equity work. It would be instructive to see whether and how the different narratives of race that impact differently racialized groups give rise to different views on
collaboration with Whites and different narratives of resistance. Also, though we know that white voices are over-represented within the literature about white racial equity work, I am not aware of any studies that specifically examine white perspectives on racial equity collaborations with Blacks. Such a study might be placed in conversation with the present study to gain a fuller understanding of these collaborations.

Finally, further research might include a more in-depth investigation of the effects of gender, class, religion, disability and sexuality upon the ways that Blacks navigate the contradictions in their collaborations. Participants could be asked specific questions exploring their understanding and experience of these axes of inequity with respect to collaborating with Whites in racial equity work.

9.5 Concluding Remarks

It is my hope that this research has deepened our understandings of racial equity collaborations between Blacks and Whites and of white racial equity work. I anticipate that it will inform the ways that Blacks work in collaborations with Whites in racial equity work, giving them/us a readily articulated understanding of what we are doing when we position Whites to speak or act for antiracism on the basis of their whiteness. It will also alert us to the pitfalls of these collaborations while we appreciate the promise of these collaborations, however constrained this may be. It also gives strategies for navigating the contradictory context of these collaborations, describing some strategies that may be implemented to successfully limit the intrusion of whiteness into these contexts. I have already personally benefitted from these insights as I do my own racial equity work.
For white racial equity workers, this study provides a clear discussion of how Blacks understand and experience racial equity collaborations with Whites, and proposes what they find to be an appropriate politics for approaching these collaborations. If taken seriously, this study will assist the white racial equity worker to make the shift from approaches that pursue expertise and authority to those that speak of unknowing and humility; from those that are self-serving to those that struggle against white privilege and take the risks associated with racial equity work.

Racial equity work entails arduous struggle against white supremacy for nonwhite liberation and agency. It is my opinion that this struggle is advanced when we seek to challenge racial inequity everywhere that it is manifest—even in those areas where common sense might least prepare us to expect it, such as within racial equity collaborations.
REFERENCES


Dei, G. S. (2006a). "We cannot be color blind": Race, antiracism, and the subversion of dominant thinking. In E. W. Ross, & V. Ooka Pang (Eds.), *Race, ethnicity and education (praeger perspectives series)* (pp. 25-42) Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.


Dei, G. S. (2008b). *Personal communication, April 23*


Dei, G. S., Hall, B. L., & Rosenberg, D. G. (2000). Introduction. In G. S. Dei, B. L. Hall, & D. G. Rosenberg (Eds.), Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world (pp. 3-20). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


Family Service Association of Toronto. (2006). *Anti-oppression policy*


Statistics Canada. (2008/2003). Selected educational characteristics (29), age groups (5A), sex (3) and visible minority groups (15) for population 15 years and over, for Canada, provinces, territories and census metropolitan areas, 2001 census - 20% sample data. catalogue # 97F0010X2001045. Retrieved September 20, 2008 from http://www12.statcan.ca/myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetriveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=68642&GID=517770&METH=1&APATH=3&PTYPE=55496&THEME=44&SID=0&FREE=0&FOCUS=0&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=&GC=0&GK=0&SC=1&SR=1&RL=0&CPP=99&RPP=9999&d1=2&d2=0


**APPENDIX I**

**Information Letter/Consent Form**

My name is Philip Howard, and this letter is to give you information about my research project, and to invite you to participate.

This research is being completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph. D in Sociology and Equity Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where my academic supervisor is Professor George Dei.

As an African Canadian concerned with racism in Canadian society, I am interested in understanding the relationships between African Canadians and white Canadians who work in initiatives challenging racism. Specifically, I am interested in the terms which define the working relationships, positive and/or negative, between African Canadians and white Canadians as they undertake this work.

To investigate this, I will use a Qualitative Research method which is the type of research best suited to understanding issues of this nature. I am seeking the participation of twelve to fifteen Black/African Canadians who work, or have worked, with/in groups, organizations, and initiatives seeking to combat racism.

If you agree to participate, your part in this research will involve a 1-2 hr one-on-one interview and a 2-2.5 hr focus group session taking place between July and November 2006. Both will occur at a time and location that is convenient for you. At no time will you be required to speak about anything you would prefer not to discuss, and you may decline to answer any of the questions asked. These sessions will be recorded and later, transcribed. I will provide you a copy of your interview transcript, which you can check, make corrections to, and/or give further input as you see fit.

In a study that investigates a specialized type of work like antiracism work, absolute confidentiality is difficult to attain. However, please be assured that I will take all necessary steps to ensure your anonymity in the following ways: All personal information in this study will remain confidential. In the final report and any articles generated from this research, pseudonyms will be used. Also, all details that could identify you will be changed or withheld—including information about the organization(s) with which you do your equity work. Focus group members are ensured confidentiality to the extent that the other members of the group respect the commitment to not discuss the information outside of the group.

There is no pressure for you to participate in this research, and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time without consequence—personal, professional, or institutional. You may also request that parts of the interview not be recorded, transcribed, or used in data analysis.
The recordings and transcripts will be kept under lock and key, and access to the data will be limited to my academic supervisor, Dr. George Dei and me. Any raw data collected will be destroyed within 10 years of the successful completion of this project.

Feedback on the research findings will be made available upon request in the form of copies of the completed dissertation. Research findings may be used for presentations at academic conferences and/or for academic publications.

Should you have further questions, please feel free to contact me at (905) 665-8383 or by email at phoward@oise.utoronto.ca. Dr. George Dei may be contacted at (416)-923-6641, ext 2513 or at gdei@oise.utoronto.ca.

If you agree to participate, please sign below and complete the Background Information Survey (enclosed). At that point you may either return these forms to me at the address below, and I will contact you to schedule an interview. Otherwise, you may contact me by phone or email, at which time we will schedule the interview and you may return the signed forms to me when we meet for the interview. Duplicate copies of these forms have been provided for you. Please keep these for your records.

Thank you for considering participation in my study.

Sincerely,

Philip Howard
Ph. D Candidate/Dept. of Sociology and Equity Studies/OISE/UT
38 Pinebrook Crescent,
Whitby, ON.
L1R 2J7

I __________________________________________ (please print name) have had Philip Howard’s research project explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to have clarified any questions I had about the project. I agree to be a participant in this study. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without consequence—personal, professional or institutional.

Signature _______________________________ Date ______________
Telephone Number ____________________ Email address ______________________

*This letter/form was printed on Department letterhead before distribution.*
APPENDIX II

Background Information Survey for Participants

Name _________________________________

Phone Number______________________ Email Address _______________________

Gender ______________

Race or Ethnicity _____________________

Age or Date of Birth __________________

Place of Birth_______________________.

If not born in Canada, how long have you been in Canada?________________________

Organization with which you do equity work ___________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Position/Job Title at that organization _________________________________________

Please describe your role in the organization. ___________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX III

Question Schedule for Interviews

Background
1. Please tell me about yourself and how you came to do this work/work in this organization.


3. Given the constraints that you work under, can you relate an example of where you felt you did effective work fighting racism? What assists you? What limits what you can do?

Terms of relationship Q1
4. Do you think there is a difference between the roles of Whites and Blacks in fighting racism?

5. If so, what is the relationship between the work of white antiracists and Black antiracists

6. What are your feelings about white leadership in (organizations) fighting racism?

Profile of white ally/white antiracism Q2
7. Describe a white person you have worked with in fighting racism who you thought was effective. What made her/him effective?

8. Do you think things would be different if this person were a man/woman?

9. Describe a white person you have worked with who you thought was a poor ally in fighting racism. What made her/him a poor ally?

10. Paint a profile of an ideal or effective white ally? (What should they know; what character traits should they have; how should they behave?)

11. (How) does gender affect the white ally’s antiracism work?

12. (How) do other oppressions (such as class, disability, sexuality) affect the life/identity of a white ally and their effectiveness in antiracism work?

13. What advice do you have for white allies?

14. What advice would you offer to the Black person working with a white ally?
Disagreement Q3
15. Have there ever been instances in which you and a white colleague disagreed about a course of action or strategy. If yes, please describe the situation. (How) was it resolved? What was this like for you?

16. Some speak of the subtlety of some forms of racism. Do you think being Black or white has advantages or disadvantages for recognizing this type of racism? How?

Effects on Blacks Q4
17. Please relate an experience you have had working with a white ally that troubled or upset you. Feel free to say there have been none if that is true. Relate it as if you were videotaping it. What was this like for you? Why do you think this happened? What did you do, if anything?

18. Please relate a positive or pleasant experience you have had working with a white ally. Feel free to say there have been none if that is true. Relate it as if you were videotaping it. What was this like for you? What made the incident positive for you?

19. Please describe your comfort level with respect to being yourself/saying what you think when working with Whites in fighting racism.

20. What are the advantages for antiracism of working in a multiracial antiracism initiative?

21. What are the disadvantages for antiracism of working in a multiracial antiracism initiative?

22. Is there a white ally who you would consider a close friend? If so, explain what made you friends. If not, why not?

23. Is there anything else you would like to say? Are there any questions you would like to ask me -- on or off the record?
APPENDIX IV

Examples of Interventive In-Depth Interviewing Techniques

Sample 1

Philip: And the question I wanna ask is just what is racism, and how does racism work in today’s Canadian society? And if you can give me examples. …

Terrence: Fair enough. … I think what we are dealing with right now is that, not only the intent to exclude is not there, the desire to exclude is not there. And I’m not suggesting to you that we don’t have people that are racist. In every society you have individuals, but I think the issue we’re talking now is systemic. Whether or not the systematic exclusion, I think there is less and less example. … I think what we are dealing with now is more subtle. I don’t call it racism. I call it culture. … It seems to be now the source of exclusion to the point that you may have a Caucasian from Latvia experiencing the same experience as a Black person from Africa. To me that’s the subtlety in the differences. And in Canada right now, I think we are dealing with cultural exclusion rather than ethnic exclusion …

Philip: OK, it’s interesting that you speak of it in those terms, and that you brought up the example of the person from Latvia, for example. It’s been interesting to me, for example, as a teacher to find that the Scottish person, with a heavy brogue finds an easier way in to teach English than the Indian person who speaks perfect English, but speaks it with an Indian accent. And I wonder at times like that whether or not we’re still talking about a race aspect. … So I’m, just going down this road a little bit, maybe if you could tease that apart a little bit and explain whether or not there is not still a racial dimension

Terrence: … your point is quite well taken. I really think that there is a hierarchy, but this is because many people who have been here have been used to certain things. So for example, you may react less offense, or if you hear that we are celebrating St. Patrick’s, because since you were a kid we’ve been celebrating ST. Patrick’s. but if I say tomorrow morning, I’m celebrating Diwali, or I’m celebrating Black History or Caribana, the reaction may be somewhat different. …

Philip: And I hear you. And we’re gonna move off this question real quickly. It does provide a good background for what we are going to do. But I’ll share with you one of the first things that we come across when we’re doing antiracism scholarship at this point in time is that, unlike what you have said, we don’t consider intent an important issue. Whether or not somebody intends to discriminate.

Terrence: It’s the effect. It’s the effect.

Philip: It’s the effect, right. So I could very well agree with you that the effect is generally over culture and it’s not ethnic and so on and so forth. But in that the history
that we’re talking about here as you talk about how the society is evolving over time, the history of this society is rooted in

**Terrence**: Racism

**Philip**: Colonialism and racism

**Terrence**: Blatant racism.

**Philip**: Very much so.

**Terrence**: Aboriginals are a great example of that.

**Philip**: There you go. And then it spills into what’s going on today

**Terrence**: Agreed!

**Philip**: I guess, what I’m doing is pulling together our positions and saying that if we lay aside intent, if we lay aside whether or not somebody is *wanting* to do this on the basis of colour, there is still going to be an effect, ahm, in terms of hirings if we’re talking about teachers or newscasters or so and so, there’s still going to be an effect that is a racial effect.

**Terrence**: [Absolutely]

**Philip**: and as such it qualifies in my books as racism, where racism is understood as not necessarily about whether or not one intended to be bigoted.

**Terrence**: Based on your definition, I have no disagreement. Are we facing a race issue in Canada? Yes. Otherwise people like me would not exist doing what I do. I think where the nuance comes from my perspective, is that when your questions will deal with potential solutions to this issue, the differentiation of intent becomes important. Because if I go to a senior executive of this company, and I say, “You are racist and that’s why we don’t have visible minorities,” the person will not see themselves as racist. The person does not believe they are racist. And the person knows inside that they’re not racist as a general rule. So the argument cannot hold true anymore. There’s a time when it could hold. In 2006 it doesn’t. So that means to deal with the effects, I have to go much more on an educational bent than on a legislative or coercive bent.

**Philip**: OK. I see where you’re going with that.
Sample 2

Philip: Is a strange thing in terms of the interview, because on the one hand I hear you saying, because for most of the interview, you’re saying, “Race doesn’t make a huge difference here. It really depends on whether or not you’re qualified, it depends on whether or not you know what you’re talking about, it depends on what, you know that kind of thing, and I don’t know if that’s the message you wanna send. But on the other hand I’m hearing you saying though but still if you’re gonna advise the institution, which I’m looking at as a white organization and maybe that’s wrong, that you can’t do it with them. You have to get your stuff together first and then go to them. So on one level you’re saying, “yeah well the race stuff matters.” Ahm We’ve gotta get it together inside of our own community and get what we’re doing and move forward, but, and then, the other hand I’m also hearing a general message that sort of says, “You know what? Its not limited by race. You could be a good—“ I don’t know how to, I don’t know if you understand where I’m going. Some people I’ve spoken to have just been very clear about, you know, you have sincere white people who are doing antiracism work. Sincere, nice, good, have a good heart, but they’re not, you know, I can’t get, there’re certain things they can and cannot do because they don’t have the experience personally, so they need to do this kind of thing whereas, you know, Black folks need to take leadership on this kind of thing. And of course they’re talking about qualified Black people. They’re not talking about any old person [Yah. Yeah] So race certainly, I would agree with you, race certainly doesn’t matter, you know, if its like, you can’t throw any Black person into this role and expect them to be good. They would have to be a qualified person. Same way you couldn’t throw any white person into the role and expect them to be good, but if you did have a Black person and a white person doing the role, even when they’re not trying, they both want to do a good job, that there’re certain liabilities that come from being white because they don’t have the experience of being oppressed and stuff and so on and so forth. And so, you know

Keith: I’ll tell you something why there’s probably some confusion, because [Its not confusing, but I just, I guess, Its not clear to me, because I’m sure you’re not confused] I am not confused, but when you’re dealing with generalizing, we’re not generalizing, but talking about Black issues or white issues on a whole, or when you’re talking about Black issues only within our community structure [Mm hm] right? So what I’m saying is, like, I may talk about things about Black people on a whole, I keep talking the societal things [Right] and them some cases you go back to the community issues [OK] right/ So maybe that’s where the confusion comes in. I’m saying that anybody that’s doing community work has to understand their community. [OK. That’s clear] That’s my point there. [And can’t we define community in terms of race?] When I’m talking about community, no I’m not talking, I—our concept is when you’re dealing with race relations work, I don’t see any white folks out their in our community championing race relations work. [And when you talk about] I don’t see it [And I guess for me I need to be clear on what you mean by community. Because when some people say community they mean the Black community, but you may be saying the Canadian City A community [Canadian City A, This area community ^^. I’m talking about the This area community. I’m not talking about the Black community] OK]
Keith: Because I say, ?? the Black community, we still not as united as I would like to see. Unity among the Black community is not there. That’s why I say sometimes, some white folks championing our cause more than our own Black people [Right] in the This area community. [But at the same time you said that there’s no white people out there championing our cause.] Yeah, if you-- , they’re not at the forefront. But if you access them or go to them, “Well listen, my name is Philip Howard, and I’m doing this thing and I need your support” (snaps fingers) they’re there. That’s what I’m saying. They’re (snaps fingers) there to help you. But they’re not at the forefront pushing the issue. That’s why I’m saying that we as Black people is the ones that have to be out there championing the cause, pushing the issues, getting the allies to support us [OK] right? That’s what I’m saying.
## APPENDIX V

**Frequency of Participant Excerpts in Thesis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chap 4</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Chap 5</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Chap 6</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Chap 7</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>Chap 8</th>
<th>Tot</th>
<th>TOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>4.5-**</td>
<td>4.6-*</td>
<td>4.7-*</td>
<td>4.8-*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2-[*]</td>
<td>5.5-*</td>
<td>5.6-**</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1-*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>4.4-****</td>
<td>4.7-*</td>
<td>4.8-*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.6-**</td>
<td>6.3-***</td>
<td>6.5-**</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.3-*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>4.2-*</td>
<td>4.4-*</td>
<td>4.8-***</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.2-**</td>
<td>6.5-*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.2-****</td>
<td>7.3-*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>4.5-**</td>
<td>4.7-*</td>
<td>4.9-*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2-*</td>
<td>5.4-*</td>
<td>5.6-**</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1-[*]</td>
<td>6.2-*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quentin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.6-**</td>
<td>6.3-*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5-*</td>
<td>7.3-**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.2-**</td>
<td>8.3-*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajani</td>
<td>4.5-**</td>
<td>5.2-[*]</td>
<td>6.1-*</td>
<td>6.4-***</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.2-****</td>
<td>7.3-[*]</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2-*******</td>
<td>8.3-********</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>4.3-**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.4-***</td>
<td>6.5-*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.2-**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.2-****</td>
<td>8.3-**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>4.2-(<em>)(</em>)</td>
<td>4.8-(*)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4-*</td>
<td>5.6-*</td>
<td>6.2-*</td>
<td>6.3-***</td>
<td>6.5-**</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.2-*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>4.5-*</td>
<td>4.6-*</td>
<td>4.7-*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5-*</td>
<td>5.6-****</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2-**</td>
<td>6.3-****</td>
<td>6.4-**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>4.3-**</td>
<td>4.4-**</td>
<td>4.8-*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.2-*</td>
<td>6.1-*</td>
<td>6.2-*</td>
<td>6.3-*</td>
<td>6.5-**</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTALS | 33 | 22 | 58 | 59 | 100 | 272 |

[] = focus group or email response
{} = Overlap of quote used in another section
() = repeat in same chapter