

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jensen T. Woods for the degree of Master of Science in College Student Services Administration presented on April 29, 2020.

Title: Shattering the Mirror: An Autoethnographic Study of White Womanhood and Student Affairs.

Abstract approved:

---

Larry D. Roper

This thesis analyzes the relationship between whiteness, womanhood, and the profession of student affairs using the method of autoethnography and the guiding question: *How does my personal understanding of white womanhood affect my work and role as a student affairs practitioner?* The researcher identifies three goals at the beginning of the research: (1) to encourage more white women student affairs practitioners to engage in personal reflection about their racial and gender identities and how these identities relate to higher education; (2) to critically evaluate how I have been socialized as a white woman to understand my own privilege and marginalization in a United States context; (3) to identify ways in which white women student affairs practitioners can better work with white women students on the intersection of racial and gender identity development. Aligned with the goals of autoethnography, the researcher aims to situate her own story within and alongside the culture and story of student affairs. Data collection included self-inventory, self-reflection, self-observation, and external data sources such as interviews with student

affairs practitioners. Then, the researcher analyzed the data through story and found three themes; characteristics of white supremacy culture (specifically perfectionism, individualism, and professionalism), the need for validation and desire to be “good”, and silence.

The results suggest that socialized whiteness and socialized womanhood each are important aspects to pursuing a career in student affairs. The results also suggest a personal sense of disconnection and the need to re-evaluate the purpose of social justice in student affairs for white women. Recommendations to practitioners include evaluating multicultural and antiracist education practices utilized in student affairs to ensure racial identity education is not solely for the benefit of white students. In addition, practitioners (particularly white practitioners) should engage in autoethnographic and self-reflection processes in order to better understand their individual participation in white supremacy. Third, the author recommends that white women practitioners continually question what it means to create brave spaces for white women students and colleagues to bring forward questions. White women practitioners should also evaluate their role in giving validation or not in these situations. Lastly, because of the nature of autoethnography, the author provides personal recommendations for herself.

©Copyright by Jensen T. Woods  
April 29, 2020  
All Rights Reserved

Shattering the Mirror: An Autoethnographic Study of White Womanhood and Student  
Affairs

by  
Jensen T. Woods

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Science

Presented April 29, 2020  
Commencement June 2020

Master of Science thesis of Jensen T. Woods presented on April 29, 2020

APPROVED:

---

Major Professor, representing College Student Services Administration

---

Director of the School of Language, Culture, and Society

---

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

---

Jensen T. Woods, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to every person who has supported me in this academic journey. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Larry Roper, for guidance throughout the thesis process and for always sharing wise and transformative advice about higher education and life. I would also like to thank my committee members, Emily Bowling, Charlene Martinez, and Dr. Dwaine Plaza, who have each been important individuals throughout my graduate career. Each of you have provided me with space for growth, challenged me to become a better academic and practitioner, and assisted me in defining my own understanding of social justice. I am sincerely grateful for the time I have had to learn from and with each of you in and out of the classroom. I would also like to thank Dr. Erich Pitcher for all of their guidance throughout my first year in graduate school and for pushing me to think and write more critically. I would like to extend gratitude to each of the practitioners and students who assisted with this project by sharing their own stories. I am so appreciative of the time each of you took to be a part of this experience.

I would also like to thank each of the professors, instructors, supervisors, and mentors who have helped shape my understanding of student affairs and have been a part of my graduate experience over the last year and a half. To all my mentors from my undergraduate career who encouraged me to apply to graduate school and helped me throughout the process, you are each such an important part of my journey and serve as role model student affairs practitioners to me. Thank you for continuing to serve as mentors to me and for talking me through some of the difficulties of graduate

school. Thank you also for being a part of my story; as is reflected in these pages, you all made significant impacts for me and I am grateful for your constant support.

Lastly, to my friends and family who have supported me along this, at times, turbulent journey, I have no words to express my gratitude for you. You are each such an important part of my story and it would be incomplete without one of you. I especially want to thank my parents for supporting my ideas and goals throughout my life and through the last two years; thank you for helping to keep me grounded and remind me that there is a world outside of my own. Lena, thank you for always reminding me of my own strength and distracting me in the most difficult times with our cherished long-distance calls. Lastly, Lyric, thank you for always being there to support throughout this process and consistently sharing your love and support with me. I truly do not know how I would have gotten through this process without your patience, listening, and care.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Literature Review .....	5
Introduction .....	5
Background of Higher Education .....	6
Historical and Current Context of Student Affairs .....	8
Antiracist Education in Student Affairs .....	11
Racial and Gender Identity Development in Higher Education .....	14
Distancing and Defense Mechanisms When Confronted With Race, Racism, and White Supremacy .....	19
Conclusion .....	25
III. Methodology .....	26
Introduction .....	26
Design .....	27
Participants .....	30
Procedures and Timeline .....	31
Data Collection .....	31
Analysis .....	32
Quality and Rigor .....	32
Ethical Considerations .....	33
IV. Results .....	36
Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture .....	36

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Perfectionism .....	37
Individualism .....	39
Professionalism .....	40
The Need for Validation and Desire to be “Good” .....	42
Silence .....	46
Conclusion .....	48
V. Discussion .....	49
Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture .....	49
Perfectionism .....	50
Individualism .....	52
Professionalism .....	53
The Need for Validation and Desire to be “Good” .....	54
Silence .....	56
Gluing the Pieces Back Together and Creating a New Picture .....	58
Conclusion .....	60
VI. Conclusion .....	61
References .....	65

## I. Introduction

“Gender is located in a racialized context and as a consequence has racial meaning. Race both constructs and fragments our understanding of gender” (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 269). When I first began my social justice journey, I was an eighteen-year-old undergraduate student. I had moved from my hometown outside of Seattle, Washington to Fort Collins, Colorado to go to college, and at the end of my first year, got a job working for the on-campus programming board. I had no idea how much this job would become a part of and change my life. Through this job, I started learning about identity, power structures, and oppression. I dove in headfirst and wanted to learn all I could, feeling like I had been missing something all of my life. I would focus my learning, pinpointing the various identities I needed to learn more about, always one at a time. Even though I read Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) groundbreaking intersectionality piece in my first ethnic studies course, I did not understand how identities construct one another until a memorable moment towards the end of my third year.

It was April 2017, and I was attending the White Privilege Conference in Kansas City with some coworkers and supervisors. We were all sitting in the grand ballroom listening to the opening announcements and keynote speaker. At this time, I do not remember many specifics of what he spoke about, but I do remember one moment clearly still. The room was dark; the lights were turned down so only the speaker was lit up, but the energy was also dark, full of fear, sadness, and anxiety. It had only been about four months since the 2016 presidential election had concluded, and the speaker was addressing it. He was speaking of a sad time for many of us, but he was also making jokes and lightening the mood. The speaker flipped to his next slide, a stock image of two white women with the text “52%” next to them. The speaker went on to talk about the role white women had in voting in the current president. He then asked, “white women,

where are you? It's time to show up". I felt my face get hot and my stomach start to churn. I tried to stay focused on the rest of his presentation, but my thoughts were swirling around.

*"Why would he say that at a conference where most white women attending are likely not part of the 52%?..Why would he group all white women together like that, isn't that defeating the purpose of this conference?...He doesn't know anything about me, I have been upset about this election for months...I'm showing up by being here. I'm trying to do the work. I know that's more than a lot of people can say. At least I'm here."*

This moment has stuck with me as the first time I began to understand my whiteness and gender as a cisgender woman as being intertwined, always informing and constructing one another. The speaker helped set me on a self-discovery path exploring what it means to be white, a woman, and a white woman. As I entered more into the world of student affairs, this question became more important to me, as I could not help but notice how many white women work in the profession. The majority of student affairs practitioners are white women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), a fact that compelled me to ask myself why I chose to enter this profession. I also began to notice how few white women in the profession who I encountered seemed to have an understanding of their whiteness. I started becoming bothered by how much student affairs claimed to value social justice but how few practitioners seemed to understand how white supremacy operates on the individual level.

When I entered graduate school, I had aspirations of working in diversity, dialogue, or equity related programs. As I became more invested in my graduate program, I found myself continually wondering if student affairs was a field which I could truly make change in, particularly as a white person. I started to believe that white people, including myself, might often cause more harm than good when trying to serve students of color and I questioned all

of my previously held beliefs of student affairs. During my second term of graduate school, I wrote an essay in which I posed three questions to myself:

- What is my responsibility to social justice and diversity work in student affairs as a white person?
- How do I work to pursue and exemplify the values of social justice and diversity when I constitute the majority within student affairs?
- How do I ethically and effectively work with students and colleagues in social justice work when I hold multiple identities and positions of privilege?

I still grapple with these questions and have not found concrete answers to any of them, though I do not know if I ever will. I certainly have more ideas than I did when I first wrote these questions, and I feel slightly more confident in my ability to answer these questions for myself, but I know the work is fluid. Focusing on these questions also allowed me to guide my work inward and focus more on what brought me to student affairs and what might keep me in the profession. When I began to focus my work on myself, I was reminded of my time at the White Privilege Conference, when I first began to recognize myself as a white woman. During that same conference, I decided I would begin applying for student affairs graduate programs. I felt that graduate school was the next step in my self-reflection and self-discovery journey.

This thesis is an autoethnographic study of my socialization as a white woman in higher education. The study was focused on three goals in particular: (1) to encourage more white woman student affairs practitioners to engage in personal reflection about their racial and gender identities and how these identities relate to higher education; (2) to critically evaluate how I have been socialized as a white woman to understand my own privilege and marginalization in a United States context; (3) to identify ways in which white women student affairs practitioners

can better work with white women students on the intersection of racial and gender identity development. Through self-observation, self-reflection, and information gathered from external sources, I attempted to achieve the aforementioned goals by placing my own story within the story of higher education and student affairs. I examined experiences which occurred before contact with higher education, as well as experiences from my undergraduate and graduate careers. Most of the experiences and memories shared in this thesis are from my time in higher education so I can best situate my story within the context of student affairs. Three themes emerged through my research, including the need for validation, characteristics of white supremacy culture, and silence. In the discussion chapter, I explain how these themes influence my identity as a white woman practitioner and give recommendations for other practitioners and the field of student affairs.

It is important to acknowledge that this work is grounded in an intersectional framework and with an understanding that one's identities are always informing one another (Mawhinney, 1998). I am particularly interested in gendered dynamics in white racial identity development. Related to their gender identity, women may have a better understanding of what it means to have "one up/one down" (Accapadi, 2007, p. 210) identities, meaning they experience both privilege and oppression due to their whiteness and womanhood, respectively. Mawhinney argued no individual is ever only one identity, and therefore the intersections of identities must be critically evaluated, especially in social justice work and education. I aim to evaluate some of the intersections of whiteness and womanhood in my own experiences through the sharing of my story. I also hope to reveal how these intersections affect the work I, and other white women practitioners, do in student affairs.

The stories presented in this autoethnography have developed from deep, personal experiences and reflections. Upon first reading the stories and reflections, they may come across as dark, regretful, or lonely. I feel it is necessary to reassure readers that these emotions were real throughout the reflection and writing process, and I assure readers I am stronger and more fulfilled after accessing those emotions and completing the reflection process.

## II. Literature Review

### Introduction

This literature review explores topics including a brief history of American higher education, the context of student affairs, racial and gender identity development for white women, and defensive and distancing strategies of white people. Overall, the research will explore the relationship between student affairs professional roles and the personal identity development of white women. This study was completed within a context of higher education, and recommendations are provided for student affairs practitioners working within the field, therefore it is necessary to provide historical and current context of both student affairs and higher education as a whole. In addition, identity development models and literature about whiteness and womanhood are important to this study to help explain some of my experiences and the experiences of practitioners. This literature is also important for practitioners to consider when working with white women students. Throughout this literature review, the terms *woman* and *women* will be used and within the context of this study, these terms apply to cisgender women. It is also important to note that most research focuses on a man/male-woman/female binary (Kelan, 2010). Due to this fact, the variety of experiences within gender are not typically captured within gendered research.

White women comprise over half of student affairs practitioners in the United States (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). This is a compelling fact to me, as I also identify as a white woman entering the professional field of student affairs. White women exist in a unique circumstance navigating identity – as Accapadi (2007) explained, they navigate “one up/one down” identities constantly (p. 210). With institutional expectations to further missions of diversity and inclusion, as well as professional expectations to develop multicultural

competencies and advise students in doing the same, many white women overlook the need to do personal work in understanding race and gender in their own lives (Selzer, Evans-Phillips, & Johnson, 2017). It is not possible for white women practitioners to truly advise or “help” students without understanding how their own socialized identities impact their professional work, particularly with students and colleagues of color (Poon, 2018; Selzer, Evans-Phillips, & Johnson).

### **Background of Higher Education**

It is important to begin with a brief history on the founding of American higher education, as higher education is the context which this study resides. The establishment of higher education in the United States is parallel to the establishment of race and racism in the country (Cabrera, 2018; Poon, 2018; Wilder, 2013). The first universities, including Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton, and others, were physically constructed by enslaved African people, and the men who controlled and initiated the creation of these institutions were typically plantation owners or employed through the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Wilder). In addition, the land which universities were built upon was stolen from Native Americans by European colonizers, and in order to spread Christianity and the white race, Harvard established an Indian College (Wilder). The purpose of this college was to teach Indigenous students European and Christian literature, history, and beliefs, and for the students to spread this knowledge to their communities (Wilder). Plantation owners, reverends, and other wealthy white settlers would send their sons off to universities to become prepared leaders for their colonies; which included learning Christian morals, the fundamentals of capitalism, and the creation of an all-white future (Thelin & Gasman, 2011; Wilder). As Thelin and Gasman noted, one of the primary purposes of

higher education at this time was to maintain social status and norms, not provide opportunities for social mobility.

Laws and culture in the United States have obviously changed over the past few centuries, and higher education institutions often boast about their diverse student populations and equal opportunities for all students (Ahmed, 2012). However, it would be ignorant to assume that the relationship between the establishment of higher education and race and racism in the United States simply disappeared with time and a slight culture shift. As Wilder (2013) argued, higher education in the United States was founded upon white supremacist ideals and the establishment of racism, and while small, and still significant, changes can be made, white supremacy and racism will remain the pillars of higher education as long as it exists. Further, Gusa (2010) stated

[t]oday's [predominantly white institutions] do not have to be explicitly racist to create a hostile environment. Instead, unexamined historically situated White cultural ideology embedded in the language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge allow these institutions to remain racialized. (p. 465)

While there have been changes made in higher education since its founding, the foundation of white supremacy upon which it was built remains, and affects how students, staff, and faculty experience their institutions in the present day.

Because American higher education was built upon a foundation of white supremacy, a culture of white supremacy exists within the institution (Gusa, 2010; Okun, 2016; Wilder, 2013). However, characteristics of white supremacy culture are often difficult to recognize because they are viewed as positive or normal aspects of the United States and in turn, American higher education (Gusa; Okun). Okun (2016) identified a list of characteristics of white supremacy culture, as well as antidotes to these characteristics, which impact all people living and working within a culture of white supremacy. The results of this study specifically focus on Okun's

definition of perfectionism and individualism, and an added characteristic, professionalism. Perfectionism is described as the “tendency to identify what’s wrong [and] little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what’s right...the perfectionist fails to appreciate [their] own good work, more often pointing out [their] faults or ‘failures’” (Okun, 2016, p. 28). Perfectionism is a characteristic of white supremacy which is often perpetuated through organizations and institutions, but also has a strong personal impact. Individualism is also a strongly held value in the United States and is upheld throughout the nation’s institutions. Okun describes individualism as believing one is “responsible for solving problems alone...[and] desire for individual recognition and credit” (2016, p. 33). Individualism also perpetuates competition, as the desire for recognition and credit causes a lack of teamwork and a greater focus on getting ahead of others (Okun). There are many characteristics of white supremacy culture, though perfectionism and individualism are especially relevant in the institution of higher education and the field of student affairs.

### **Historical and Current Context of Student Affairs**

White supremacy bleeds into the establishment of student affairs in higher education as well. Student affairs practitioners have an important role in American higher education, though this role has shifted over time (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). When the first higher education institutions were established, faculty were not only expected to teach students, but also take on the temporary roles of parents, and teach young men how to become proper citizens (Dungy & Gordon; Wilder, 2013). Being a proper citizen at this time typically meant adhering to the Christian faith, continuing the genocide of Indigenous peoples and cultures in order to claim land for European settlers, and using stolen land to build plantations upon which enslaved Africans would labor to create wealth for the new United States (Dungy & Gordon; Wilder). Over time,

and as institutions became bigger and able to handle more students, faculty roles shifted to focus more time on research and teaching, and thus the need for practitioners to control students outside of classes became separate from the faculty position (Dungy & Gordon). While these early student affairs roles were primarily concerned with disciplining students, they also focused on developing the student outside of the classroom to become an engaged citizen and prepared future leader for the nation (Dungy & Gordon; Thelin & Gasman, 2011).

Student affairs is a relatively new professional field in the context of higher education (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). With roots truly forming in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the profession gained a more formal establishment from the publishing of the Student Personnel Point of View in 1937 and 1949 (Dungy & Gordon). These reports grounded the importance of student affairs work and student development outside of the classroom, and are still considered foundational to the profession today (Dungy & Gordon). While the theories and practices of practitioners have changed and improved with time, the values and frameworks for the profession have remained the same (Dungy & Gordon; Reason & Broido, 2011). For example, the profession has continued to emphasize the importance of focusing on providing students a holistic education, preparing students to be responsible and engaged citizens, and advocating for social justice (Reason & Broido).

The role of student affairs practitioners has shifted slightly over time, but the ethical and philosophical foundations remain the same (Fried, 2011; Reason & Broido, 2011). Today, student affairs practitioners are expected to adhere to guidelines and competencies established by national organizations such as NASPA and ACPA (Eanes et al., 2015; Fried, 2011). These competencies emphasize the importance of understanding diversity, inclusion, and social justice within the higher education setting; topics which were not part of the founding of the

profession (Eanes et al., 2015; Evans & Reason, 2001). Practitioners are under pressure both from professional standards and students on their campuses to lead from a socially just and multicultural lens in order to improve their campuses and the student experiences for historically marginalized populations. However, as will be discussed further on, there is a tension between the ability for practitioners to serve all students in this way when the majority of student affairs practitioners' identities do not match the identities of students on campus.

Student affairs practitioners no longer engage with students in a capacity of *in loco parentis*, or in place of the parent, but rather as advisors and “helpers” (Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Reynolds, 2008, 2011). Helping professions encompass a range of roles and careers, including higher education and student affairs (Cormier, 2016; Reynolds, 2008). “Professional helpers can be distinguished from nonprofessional helpers by their identification with a professional organization, their use of an ethical code and standards of practice, and their acknowledgement of an accrediting body that governs training, credentialing, and licensing of practice” (Cormier, 2016, p. 2). Many practitioners are a part of at least one professional organization related to higher education, in fact it is highly encouraged within the field (Eanes, et al., 2015). In addition, the ACPA/NASPA competencies serve as standards for professionals and competencies to continually develop throughout one's career (Eanes, et al., 2015; Fried, 2011). While student affairs practitioners may not be licensed the same way other helping professionals are, most student affairs roles require training and credentials in related masters, and sometimes, doctoral programs for continued training and development (Fried, 2011). Most student affairs practitioners understand helping as an essential aspect of their roles on campus, and scholars have identified it as a core competency for the profession (Reynolds, 2008, 2011).

In addition to helping, a core competency of the profession includes personally developing in multicultural competence and working to advance diversity and social justice efforts on campuses (Eanes et al., 2015; Evans & Reason, 2001; Pope & Mueller, 2011; Reason & Broido, 2011). Not only does engaging students in social justice make them more engaged citizens, but as institutions become more diverse, practitioners must be able to help and support students who may have differing social identities and experiences than themselves (Evans & Reason; Pope & Mueller; Reason & Broido; Reynolds, 2008). However, “leaders in higher education and on campuses express commitment to diversity, while continuing to function in ways that perpetuate inequality, as well as demonstrating little understanding of the dimensions of diversity among students” (Roper & Whitt, 2016, p. 25). Even though there is an emphasis on multicultural competence and the advancement of social justice, many student affairs practitioners do not fulfill the diverse needs of students and in fact uphold systems of oppression in their work. Ahmed (2012) described a similar issue in practitioners’ different uses and meanings of the word diversity; meaning diversity is often a buzzword used in higher education to support an appearance of inclusion and belonging, but instead distracts from the underlying problems within institutions. Similarly, it seems student affairs as a profession uses the language of multiculturalism and social justice, but without a deeper critique of such language often allows practitioners to be disengaged from such conversations and issues (Ahmed; Poon, 2018).

Previous studies have explored the overrepresentation of women in student affairs (McEwen, Engstrom, & Williams, 1990; McEwen, Williams, & Engstrom, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006), though few have focused on racial diversity and its intersection with gender in student affairs. As a whole, student affairs is a field dominated by white cisgender women; disproportionate to the population of many of the campuses at which these professionals work

(Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Researchers found in 2018 that white females make up about 51% of student affairs practitioners, while white female students compile 30% of the overall student population in the United States (Pritchard & McChesney). Pritchard and McChesney's study also evaluated the demographics of student affairs practitioners working in counseling roles such as career counselors, student counselors, and student counseling psychologists, which make up approximately 14% of all positions in student affairs. The researchers found that white practitioners comprise 75% of this population and women comprise 77%. While the study did not disclose how many of these practitioners are white cisgender women, one can assume they are the majority based on the data.

### **Antiracist Education in Student Affairs**

Antiracist education evolved as a response to multicultural education, which emphasizes theories and practices that encourage educators to celebrate diversity and cultural differences (Kailin, 2002). Multicultural education ignores the structural racism which exists in American education and its practices often encourage assimilation into white supremacy culture (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Kailin). Antiracist education aims to interrogate structural inequality in education and focuses on practices for educators to actively dismantle structures of oppression (Kailin). While antiracist education theories and practices formed in the context of primary and secondary education (Kailin), it is applicable to higher education settings as well. However, as Kailin (2002) noted, antiracist education must be applied with intention, and the complexity of experiences and identities of the students and educators, as well as the context of higher education institutions, must be considered and examined carefully.

Student affairs is a profession which encourages educators and practitioners to reflect on their socialized identities and experiences in order to critique the world and institutions in which

they work and live (Eanes et al., 2015; Evans & Reason, 2001; Reason & Broido, 2011). Student affairs professionals are also expected to assist the students they work with to reflect on their socialized identities, in addition to educating students about concepts such as privilege, power, oppression, and social justice (Eanes et al.). Due to their responsibility in educating students about identity, practitioners working within student affairs often engage in antiracist education with a goal to teach white students about their privileged identities. However, this type of antiracist education is typically not helpful to students of color and can even cause further harm, as much of the time antiracist education in student affairs is presented in a way that solely benefits or protects white students, as is the cultural norm in the United States (Accapadi, 2007; Blackwell, 2010; Gusa, 2010; Helms, 1994). As Blackwell (2010) explained, student affairs practitioners often face a “preoccupation with identity politics, whiteness and white students... students of color are often rendered invisible on the sidelines or their personal stories are used to benefit white students and white educators” (p. 473). White students need to engage in racial identity development and practitioners have a responsibility in such efforts, but the experiences of students of color should not be used as educational opportunities for white students, as this practice continually centers whiteness.

In addition to primarily benefitting white students, the antiracist education practices many student affairs practitioners utilize do little to assist white students in understanding their white identity or the systems in which they have been socialized in and take part (Bonnett, 1996). White students learn about and reflect upon their interactions with people of color, while still viewing people of color as inherently different, and reinforcing whiteness as the norm. Bonnett (1996) claims that centering whiteness in antiracist education often creates a myth of whiteness as a fixed identity “with clear and distinct moral attributes” (p. 100). Not only does such a myth

ignore the diversity of experiences within white identities, but it places people of color in opposition to whiteness, once again othering their identities and experiences in relation to whiteness. Further, Bonnett (1996) contended that most antiracist education “has not sought to enable ‘whites’ to understand themselves as racialized subjects. Nor has it attempted to explain why and how ‘white’ people might have a stake in, or be able to engage with, antiracism as a project” (p. 102). Without helping white students examine how racialization affects all people, practitioners continue to perpetuate the problem of white people believing racism and white supremacy are problems of the past or issues only for people of color.

It is possible that antiracist education helps white students learn more about social justice values and the ways in which their identities privilege them, but again it is in relation to their peers of color. Bonnett’s (1996) argument explained how antiracist education can fail white students because it does not assist them in understanding how they have been unknowingly placed into a system which racializes their body and dehumanizes their psyche. Furthermore, a study by Schick (2010) found that students engaged in antiracist education by white educators spoke about liberal values they gained, and separated themselves from racist acts and mentalities “while accessing discursive repertoires which perform them as racially dominant” (p. 83). While white students might have developed values and mentalities which are generally considered to promote social justice and allyship, educators have failed in helping them understand their whiteness and racialized subjectivity. If white students are unable to locate their own positionality within structures of white supremacy and racism, then they unknowingly act in ways which continually center whiteness and cause harm to people of color (Bonnett).

As student affairs practitioners attempt to educate white students on social justice and assist in their identity development, they also must evaluate how white students become

successful antiracist allies. Linder (2015) examined how white women undergraduate students develop antiracist identities and how student affairs practitioners can assist in this development. In Linder's study, white women students often shared experiences of fear and defensive reactions when confronting racism, but it was essential for these students to reflect on such reactions, especially with the support of practitioners. Linder argued that practitioners can "engage in compassionate challenge and support" with students when they better understand the ways in which identities intersect to inform privilege (2015, p. 549). A study by Broido (2000) explored how college students with dominant identities engage in social justice allyship. In addition to classroom experiences, students identified involvement within student affairs as essential to their meaning-making and learning new perspectives (Broido). Broido concluded that students with mostly dominant identities who are also social justice activists are "a testament to the potential for education, and for college in particular, to promote the creation of a more equitable society" (2000, p. 17). Both studies offer guidance for student affairs practitioners to improve their practices when working with white students, as well as optimism for the implications of antiracist education in student affairs.

### **Racial and Gender Identity Development in Higher Education**

The establishment of the United States includes the enforcement of oppressive structures from colonizers (Wilder, 2013), and because structures inform culture and its people, it is important to consider how white women's socialization and development is informed by heteropatriarchy and white supremacy (Smith, 2006). Smith argued that "[h]eteropatriarchy is the building block of US empire. In fact, it is the building block of the nation-state form of governance" (2006, p. 71). Patriarchy has been used by colonizers to establish hierarchy, and so rests on a gender binary system to more smoothly create hierarchy in colonized societies (Smith).

Because heteropatriarchy has been used as a method of colonization, it is closely related to, and upholds, the establishment of white supremacy (Smith). Through the construction of the white patriarchal family, gender roles have been established in the United States in order to advance whiteness, capitalism, and genocide (Smith). In understanding the identity development of white people, women, and white women, it is also essential to acknowledge how structures of power and oppression shape development.

Unfortunately, the literature on gender identity development, particularly as it pertains to women, is quite limited (Patton et al., 2016). Scholars have generally come to a consensus that much of gender identity development is socialized prior to collegiate experiences, and higher education campuses may provide less constricting experiences related to gender (Patton et al.). However, some scholars have researched the ways in which women cognitively develop and come to understand gender as a socialized identity (Belenkey et al., 1986). Few studies though have focused on the developmental relationship between whiteness and gender (Patton et al.), even though these identities inform one another (Mawhinney, 1998; Smith, 2006).

Belenkey et al. (1986) studied the experiences and development of women from various backgrounds. Their research suggested women transition through five fluid perspectives in cognitive and personal development, including silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing, and constructed knowing (Belenkey, et al.; Love & Guthrie, 1999). Silence is a perspective which women experience because of sociological expectations and the actions of people around them (Belenkey, et al.; Love & Guthrie). Love and Guthrie described silence as “not a way of knowing, but a way of *not* knowing” (1999, p. 18). Women typically move from silence to received knowing because of an experience which prompted a new understanding of truth or challenge to authority (Belenkey, et al.). In received knowing, women trust authority to

pass on knowledge, and are still unsure of their own ability to produce their own truth and knowledge (Belenkey, et al.; Love & Guthrie). Women often transition from this received knowing to subjective knowing in college experiences, as higher education provides an atmosphere where they can learn new perspectives and challenge authority (Love & Guthrie). In subjective knowing, women recognize themselves as a source of authority and come to an understanding that truth is personal (Belenkey, et al.; Love & Guthrie).

As women shift to procedural knowing, they form stronger relationships with other women and attempt to understand external forms of authority (Belenkey, et al., 1986; Love & Guthrie, 1999). In procedural knowing, their own voice of reason develops more and they appreciate other points of view (Love & Guthrie). In the transition to the last perspective, all women go “through a period of intense self-reflection and self-analysis” (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 25). This self-reflection leads women to constructed knowing, which involves a recognition of the self as one who can produce knowledge and is aware of the process of doing so (Belenkey, et al.; Love & Guthrie). Women in this perspective understand that knowledge is constantly being constructed and personal development is a process (Love & Guthrie). It is important to note that none of these categories are fixed, and women might transition between them throughout their lives (Love & Guthrie). In addition, one of the critiques of Belenkey et al.’s work is it primarily focused on the lives of white women, and while it includes variations in class identity, it ignores the complexity of women’s lives (Love & Guthrie). Belenkey, et al.’s research is relevant to this particular project which focuses on white womanhood, though the researchers failed to acknowledge how race informed the experiences of their participants.

Helms (1995) created a model, named the White Racial Identity Ego Statuses and Information-Processing Strategies (IPS), to explain white people’s racial identity development,

and how socialization within white supremacy affects white identity (1995, p. 185). In this model, Helms utilized statuses, rather than stages, to represent individual development, and explained that the term “status” is a more accurate way to describe how one might exhibit behaviors or perspectives from multiple statuses at one time (1995, p. 182-183). In addition, status is a more fluid concept which acknowledges the complexity of socialization and individual experiences and allows the opportunity for individuals to move back and forth in their development (Helms).

The first status of Helms’s model is contact, which includes “satisfaction with racial status quo, [and] obliviousness to racism and one’s participation in it” (1995, p. 185). Individuals in this status tend to strongly believe people of color simply need to work harder and that racism no longer exists (Helms). The next status is disintegration, in which individuals are unsure and even overwhelmed with dilemmas involving race (Helms). In this status, it is common for white people to attempt to maintain loyalty to other white people while trying to “speak up” about blatant racism (Helms, 1995, p. 185). The third status is reintegration, which involves an “idealization of one’s own socioracial group” (Helms, 1995, p. 185). This status seems to provoke distancing strategies, including claiming reverse racism and a separation from personal investment in racism (Helms).

Pseudoindependence is the fourth status, where individuals often feel the need “to ‘help’ other racial groups” (Helms, 1995, p. 185). In this status a white person is still very engaged in white supremacy by believing people of color need to be saved by white people, though they likely believe their intention is pure (Helms). The fifth status is immersion/emersion, in which an individual might “search for an understanding of the personal meaning of racism and the ways by which one benefits and a redefinition of whiteness” (Helms, 1995, p. 185). In the

immersion/emersion status, white people might be involved in racial activism and better understand their participation in racism and white supremacy (Helms). The last status is autonomy, which includes “informed positive socioracial-group commitment...[and] capacity to relinquish the privileges of racism” (Helms, 1995, p. 185). In the final status, a white person actively avoids participation in white supremacy and oppression (Helms). Helms’s model of white identity development offers a fluid way to conceptualize white identity and acknowledges the nuances of life experience and circumstances. It is especially helpful for white individuals to evaluate their own white identity development and participation in white supremacy.

One other area of identity development to note is graduate student identity development, which is related closely to professional identity development (Adler & Adler, 2005). Graduate school is considered a professionalization process for students, and as such students typically experience fluctuations in confidence and questioning of their decision to enter into their specific field (Adler & Adler). Many graduate students also experience a transition phase from student to scholar and potentially teacher – though in student affairs the transition would likely be to practitioner rather than teacher (Adler & Adler). This transition process includes a period of connecting professional identity with personal identity and can help students feel more confident in their professional roles (Adler & Adler). Because most student affairs practitioners attend graduate school, and many attend early in their career (Taub & McEwen, 2006), the graduate student development process is integral to a practitioner’s personal and professional identities in relation to their work.

### **Distancing and Defense Mechanisms When Confronted With Race, Racism, and White Supremacy**

There are various reactions and mechanisms white people employ when confronted with the realities of race, racism, and white supremacy (Cabrera, 2012; Case & Hemmings, 2005; DiAngelo, 2011, 2016, 2018; Jensen, 2005; McIntyre, 1997). These reactions serve as defense moves for white people in diverting the conversation or distancing themselves from it. Researchers have focused on the reactions all white people may be familiar with (DiAngelo, 2011, 2016, 2018; Jensen, 2005), and more gender-specific strategies (Accapadi, 2007; Cabrera, 2012; Case & Hemmings, 2005; McIntyre, 1997). Overall, the research suggests that white people of all genders employ many of the same distancing strategies, though gender might influence these strategies in certain situations.

DiAngelo (2011) argued that segregation is one of the first factors leading to white fragility and white people's lack of understanding for perspectives different than their own. For example, "[b]ecause whites live primarily segregated lives in a white-dominated society, they receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity" (2011, p. 58). Because white people tend to have little understanding of how white supremacy functions in the contemporary United States, there is little knowledge, or as DiAngelo refers to "stamina" (2018), for engaging in conversations about race and racism. DiAngelo (2011; 2016) also described this phenomenon as entitlement to racial comfort white people are used to and therefore expect. DiAngelo argued that entitlement to racial comfort is evidence of white fragility, a term to describe the lack of racial stamina white people possess (2011; 2018). If white people are used to living in all or majority white areas, then whiteness and white supremacy will be their norm, creating a familiar and comfortable atmosphere free from conversations about whiteness. In order to maintain racial comfort, silence is often used as a distancing mechanism by white people to avoid taking part in conversations

about race (DiAngelo, 2011; 2016). Only by engaging in conversations in which their views on race and racism are challenged can white people build racial stamina (DiAngelo, 2018).

McIntyre (1997) defined white talk as “talk that serves to insulate white people from examin-ing their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (p. 45). White talk is something all white people engage in, typically unknowingly, with white people and people of color (McIntyre). McIntyre explained how white talk serves as a distancing mechanism for white people, as in her study it included “derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counterarguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speak-ers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a ‘culture of niceness’ that made it very difficult to ‘read the white world’” (1997, p. 46). While McIntyre explained that white talk can appear in different forms, it always serves the purpose of distancing white people from their involvement in racism and white supremacy. As McIntyre also noted, one does not have to be speaking to engage in white talk; staying silent is also considered a part of white talk which serves to distance white people from race. White talk as a distancing strategy is important to understand, as it provides an overarching view of the seemingly simple and innocent ways white people distance themselves from topics of race, racism, and white supremacy, and infringes upon white people’s ability to decenter whiteness (McIntyre).

Jensen identified emotions which white people access to distance themselves from the responsibility of race: guilt and fear (2005). White people often say they feel guilt for their privilege and being born into a racist society, though Jensen explained these reasons for guilt are unproductive. Guilt is “a convenient way to avoid accountability...[and] a way for white people to avoid taking action” (Jensen, 2005, p. 47). By avoiding engaging in useless feelings of guilt, white people distance themselves from their involvement in racism and responsibility of

dismantling white supremacy. Fear is an emotion which white people are very familiar with, though seldom admit. Jensen (2005) argued many white people are afraid of

facing the fact that some of what we white people have is unearned...[n]o matter how hard we work or how smart we are, we all know – when we are honest with our-selves – that we did not get where we are by merit alone. And many white people are afraid of that fact. (p. 53)

Coming to terms with this fact is difficult, so white people desperately cling to the dominant narrative of meritocracy; to avoid confronting this fear and distance themselves from white supremacy and racism. Another fear Jensen discussed is the fear of making a mistake, which is a common fear for white people who are at least somewhat aware of their whiteness. When fearful of making a mistake and enacting harm to people of color, white people stay silent, or choose to be inactive (Jensen). This lack of action distances white people from understanding their own involvement in race and racism and assists them in upholding white supremacy. The fear which plagues white people's minds is understandable when considering how white people have been socialized in white supremacy, but it is essential for white people to acknowledge these fears and work to let go of them so they do not serve as distancing mechanisms (Jensen).

Case and Hemmings (2005) discussed the distancing strategies white women student teachers use in the classroom when learning about antiracist education, as well as in their personal lives. Silence was one common strategy, especially when engaging in conversations with white men who said or did something racist (Case & Hemmings). Another distancing strategy the women employed was disassociating from stereotypical or racist thoughts they had and instead “associating with the good white label” (Case & Hemmings, 2005, p. 616). Many of the women identified themselves as different than other white people and more tolerant of cultural differences, even identifying themselves as colorblind in some cases (Case & Hemmings). The last theme Case and Hemmings found was a separation from responsibility of

race and racism. Within this theme, common experiences involved claiming reverse racism or discrimination, focusing on progress rather than current reality, and victim blaming (Case & Hemmings). This theme is closely related to the women claiming the “good white label” as they wanted to distance themselves from their participation in racism, and instead believe racism was an issue they did not engage in.

Accapadi (2007) discussed the common occurrence of white women crying when being told of ways they engage in racism. Utilizing a case study, Accapadi especially emphasized how often white women oppress women of color through their tears by shifting the conversation to them and away from race. Accapadi also argued that white women have the option to “toggle their identities”, and “can be both helpless without the helplessness being a reflection of all white people and powerful by occupying a position of power as any white person” (2007, p. 210). By analyzing how race and gender interact for white women, Accapadi demonstrated that white women have a unique social position in which they can engage their socialized helplessness as women, yet simultaneously control the direction of the conversation and divert it from race. Accapadi also discussed how white women often claim reverse racism is taking place in these situations, and they feel attacked by the person of color who brought race into the conversation. When a white woman claims racial victimization, the conversation is once again turned towards the white woman and therefore in her control (Accapadi). People of color are then viewed as the ones in the wrong and causing the real issues in race which white people believe they are not a part of. Accapadi explained how white women rationalize their decisions when confronted with issues of racism, which in turn rationalizes the status quo and makes people of color and their experiences seem irrational.

DiAngelo (2018) also researched the role of white women's tears as a defense mechanism in conversations about race:

Whether intended or not, when a white woman cries over some aspect of racism, all the attention immediately goes to her, demand-ing time, energy, and attention from everyone in the room when they should be focused on ameliorating racism...In a common but particularly subversive move, racism becomes about white distress, white suffering, and white victimization. (p. 134)

DiAngelo's argument is consistent with Accapadi's (2007), and demonstrates the impact white women often have on discussions of race, racism, and white supremacy, albeit sometimes unknowingly. By crying and focusing attention on oneself, white women center white comfort as the priority (DiAngelo, 2018). DiAngelo (2018) also argued that in racially distressing instances white women often claim they are being attacked or state that "reverse racism" is taking place; another distancing mechanism consistent with other research (Accapadi, 2007; Cabrera, 2018). Tears are a common strategy white women have been socialized to use in racially distressing situations throughout history (DiAngelo, 2018). However, because of white women's socialized gender, white people often fail to understand the impact of these tears on people of color (Accapadi; DiAngelo).

While this project focuses on the experiences of white women in student affairs, it is important to note some of the research on white men's defensive and distancing reactions when confronted with race. In his research focused on the experiences of white males on college campuses, Cabrera (2014, 2018) discussed some of the strategies white men employ to distance themselves from issues of race and racism. One theme in Cabrera's work was participants arguing race was no longer a problem, yet claiming reverse racism when confronted with racial issues. These students often tried to rationalize racial segregation on college campuses, and claim discrimination against white people was to blame, rather than systematic oppression in

higher education (Cabrera, 2014, 2018). To this point, Cabrera argued that personal racial victimization by white students rationalizes “the persistence of segregated, white campus subenvironments” (2018, p. 30). Many of the students in Cabrera’s study also claimed reverse racism when they felt a space was not intended for them, such as multicultural Greek organizations. However, when a space was made up of all or majority white students, the men believed it to be inclusive, or simply by circumstance (Cabrera). Cabrera’s connection between white men’s claims of reverse racism and segregated campuses clearly depicts how white students uphold white supremacy.

Additionally, Cabrera found that white men tended to be comfortable in their predominantly white classrooms until race was brought up. “[W]hen the norm of color-blindness was disrupted in classrooms and curricula, the responses were very telling” (Cabrera, 2018, p. 89). Cabrera expands this theme by explaining that one participant gave a detailed account of his experience in a Chicano literature class, and he was very uncomfortable with the history that was discussed regarding racism and white supremacy in the United States. “In classroom space where racism was ignored, he was comfortable; where racism was engaged, he was uncomfortable” (Cabrera, 2018, p. 89). When white students were confronted with the history of racism and white supremacy, they often shut down, believing they should not be held accountable for the choices of their ancestors and continuing to talk about it only aggravated the issue (Cabrera). Cabrera (2018) coined the term white immunity to describe the experiences white male college students were having regarding resisting accountability for race and racism. Preferring this term over white privilege, Cabrera argued that white immunity is “a more accurate description of how ‘privilege’ operates...it more closely aligns with the way that Whiteness was formed in the U.S. context” (2018, p. 12). White immunity is also applicable to white women, as whiteness allows

white people to disengage from issues from racism and white supremacy (Cabrera). As Cabrera explained, one can acknowledge their privilege without analyzing how systematic racism contributed to such privilege. While Cabrera's (2014, 2018) study focused on white male identifying students, the themes are relevant to white women's experiences as well, and the concept of white immunity applies to white people of all genders.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review included research about the history of higher education, historical and current context of student affairs, identity development of white women, and distancing and defense mechanisms white people utilize in conversations about race. The research provided in this review provides background and context for this project, which explores the racial and gender identity development of the author in higher education and the responsibility of student affairs practitioners in working with white women students on race. This literature review also reveals the lack of research which has been conducted to understand the intersection between gender and racial identity development for white women, and how whiteness and womanhood mutually construct one another. While the research provided informs this study and discussion, the author situates herself in an understanding that her development has largely been informed by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Smith, 2006). Lastly, this literature review provides an overview for student affairs practitioners' responsibility of helping students and engaging in conversations and experiences about social justice. As practitioners attempt to support student development, they must consider how history informs their institutions and profession, and challenge the structures which higher education was founded upon.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In this study, I explored how an immersive writing and research experience deepened my understanding of my racial and gender identities and how they connect. Through the research practice of autoethnography, I evaluated my own understanding of my racial and gender identities. I explored how I have been socialized as a white woman, how I have attempted to unlearn or re-learn much of my socialization, and how I as a white woman student affairs practitioner expect to engage in anti-racism in higher education. The guiding question of this research project was: How does my personal understanding of white womanhood affect my work and role as a student affairs practitioner?

There were three goals identified with this autoethnography. First, I hoped to encourage more white woman student affairs practitioners to engage in personal reflection about their racial and gender identities and how these identities relate to their work in higher education. Denshire (2013) discussed the importance of using autoethnography as a tool to disrupt professional norms and represent professional practices from multiple perspectives. I hope that my autoethnographic practice serves as an example to other student affairs practitioners to “hold the mirror” to themselves and consider how their identities interact and influence the way they approach their work. Second, I aimed to critically evaluate how I have been socialized as a white woman to understand my own privilege and marginalization in a United States context. The way in which I have been socialized to understand my racial and gender identities is central to who I am and how I interact with people daily (Harro, 2000; Helms, 1995). Lastly, through this project I hoped to identify ways in which white women student affairs practitioners can better work with white women students on the intersection of racial and gender identity development. Student affairs

practitioners have the hefty responsibility of supporting students in their identity development, and using effective tools and strategies is essential to achieving this goal (Eanes, et al., 2015). Through the process of writing an autoethnography, each of these goals were achieved; though it is also important to note that these are ongoing goals and I anticipate I will work with them throughout my career.

### **Design**

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method derived from the social sciences, and drawn from the method of ethnography (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). While ethnography aims to study people and culture different from the researcher, autoethnography brings the focus to the self, so the autoethnographer is both researcher and researched (Adams, Jones, & Ellis).

Autoethnography brings the scope of research both “*inward*—into our identities, thoughts, feelings, and experiences—and *outward*—into our relationships, communities, and cultures” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 46).

Autoethnography is also a process which challenges dominant and colonial ways of research, as there are few limits on the method itself (Adams & Jones, 2008; Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017; Muncey, 2005; Taber, 2010). Numerous researchers have written about the impossibility of defining autoethnography because it is so personal; creating limitations to autoethnography would defeat the purpose of the method (Adams & Jones, 2008; Denzin, 2006; Taber, 2010). Adams and Jones described the approach to autoethnography as “open[ing] definitional boundaries...Such opening does not abandon intersections or interests but instead makes the politics of knowledge and experience central to what autoethnography is and does, as well as what it wants to become” (2008, p. 377). Centering the fluidity of autoethnography was vital to this project, as it allowed me to create a flexible

process that allowed the stories to take shape as they needed to. Moreover, a lack of structure and definitions challenges white supremacy, which thrives on binary systems (DiAngelo, 2011; 2018). Challenging dominant structures, such as white supremacy, is a key aspect of autoethnography (Adams & Jones, 2008; Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017; Denshire, 2013; Denzin, 2006; Muncey, 2005), but is also essential to the personal stories shared and goals of this project.

Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) likened the design process of autoethnographic research to ethnographic research, specifically in relation to how the researcher conducts fieldwork. The first step of fieldwork is making contact with a field, and in autoethnography, the “field” can include many different physical and metaphorical sites (Adams, Jones, & Ellis). Making contact involves gaining access to the field, with the personal reflection of how one belongs and intends to be a part of a particular field. “Accessing the field means making your orientation to research and your goals for a project known to yourself and others” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 50). After accessing the field, one must adapt to it by interacting with other people, and perhaps more importantly, by truly listening and participating in the conversations and interactions in which they are taking part (Adams, Jones, & Ellis). In this particular project, accessing the field meant speaking to student affairs practitioners about their understanding of their own professional identities and efforts to engage in anti-racist work, speaking to students about their experiences with white women practitioners, and analyzing the past and present experiences which I believe are a part of my socialization as a white woman and student affairs practitioner. Accessing the field also meant attending to the power dynamics present in the moment, and paying attention to the internal emotions, assumptions, and thoughts which I had in conversations.

Informal interviews can also be a part of the autoethnography design (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). The type of interviewing used in this research was emergent interviewing, “in which interviewers visit with participants in their everyday environments and contexts, conversing and asking about experiences, practices, and perceptions as they happen” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 54). Interviews were a vital part to this research as the information within them both aligned with and challenged my own experiences, which is consistent with interviewing in autoethnographic research (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). For this research, emergent interviews took place with student affairs practitioners and students in campus coffee shops and in individuals’ offices on campus. Location was important to make the interviewee feel comfortable and to create an organic conversation in the field between the researcher and interviewee. After all interviews, I wrote down any notes and reflections which remained for me, and drew connections, or questioned a lack thereof, between my own experience and the interviewee’s.

Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) explained that “[a]utoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience” (p. 1), and thus should be carefully selected. Often the stories chosen are “epiphanies” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, p. 47) which have transformed the way one thinks about themselves and the world. Exploring and reflecting on such moments in one’s life can help to fill in potential gaps or make meaning of other experiences. The stories and experiences which I have chosen to share in this autoethnography have been identified as important to my understanding and development as a white cisgender woman living in the United States. I also chose to write about stories which adhere to the goals of autoethnography, as identified by Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015). While there are certainly more stories which inform my experience and identities, I have chosen those which I believe are most beneficial to write about

in this specific capacity of a master's thesis. There are other stories which informed my research, yet are not shared because I decided this forum was not the way to do so, as sharing those stories would not advance the goals of autoethnography.

There are multiple forms of autoethnography, though none are fixed, and autoethnographers are constantly blending styles together to best represent personal narratives (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). This autoethnography mainly follows a realism approach, which “move[s] from story to interpretation, often (though not always) creating texts that separate experience and analysis” (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 85). In particular, a layered account method is utilized in order to integrate experiences and theory. “Layered accounts reflect and refract the relationship between personal/cultural experience and interpretation/analysis” (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 85). While realism is the principal approach used in this autoethnography, one could easily identify other representations framing the narratives, as these categories are fluid.

### **Participants**

The main participant of this study was the researcher, as this study is an autoethnography. However, other people were involved in the research through informal interviews. The only selection criteria used for these individuals was that they must be student affairs practitioners. The interview participants ranged in professional roles and levels, and mostly worked at Oregon State University, but overall represented multiple higher education institutions. Participants opted into the conversations first by responding to an email, then in person when the research was discussed and the emergent interview was taking place.

## **Procedures and Timeline**

The researcher began self-interviews in August of 2019, which included journaling and reflecting on personal prompts such as “how did you notice race and/or gender today?”, “when was the first time you noticed race and/or gender?”, “how has your understanding of your own race and/or gender changed over time?”, and other personal questions as they arose throughout the reflection process. It is also important to note that the researcher considered and reflected on each of these questions before beginning the self-interview process, and these reflections informed the autoethnographic research. Emails were sent to student affairs practitioners in November of 2019, and emergent interviews occurred between November 2019 to January of 2020. Thematic analysis of the interviews was ongoing, though reflection occurred immediately after each interview in order to connect themes from the interviews with personal stories. Because of the nature of autoethnographic research, the timeline cannot be too restricted as the autoethnography must be able to progress as it needs to (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). The timeline for this project was constantly shifting as was best for the work.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection in this study involved self-inventory, self-reflection, self-observation, and external data. The self-inventory process was constant and involved recounting personal memories and experiences. The memories which I relied upon and examined were from throughout childhood, adolescence, and mostly, the most recent five and a half years of my life, which involved undergraduate and graduate education. Self-reflection involved keeping a journal and notes to reflect on current experiences and specific memories. The self-observation process overlapped with self-inventory and self-reflection often, as I was observing my own reactions to the process of reflecting and re-experiencing certain memories. Lastly, external data

collection involved meeting with students and student affairs practitioners and engaging in informal conversations about their career paths, advice, and thoughts about white women's roles in student affairs. Some of these participants identified as white women and some did not, and all were informed of the autoethnography I was conducting. Throughout each meeting I wrote notes, and after each meeting I reflected on potential power dynamics, thoughts I agreed or disagreed with, and what I learned from the practitioner. Each of these data collection processes coincided with one another throughout the autoethnography, as I was consistently reflecting, observing, and remembering experiences which inform the data and results.

### **Analysis**

Analysis in autoethnography can be a difficult process, as the researcher aims to situate their own story within and alongside a culture (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Similar to other forms of qualitative research, the first step of autoethnographic analysis involves thematizing data, and remaining open to those themes shifting. However, unique to autoethnography, the research must “focus on making sense of fieldwork through *story*” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 66, emphasis in original). In autoethnography, story is the method utilized to thematize data, and situate the researcher's personal story with the story of a culture. In this study, once data was collected, autoethnographic story was utilized to thematize and connect the data.

### **Quality and Rigor**

Data was collected in this study through the use of personal journals and notes. I kept two paper notebooks and a digital document on my own computer which I kept accounts of memories and experiences in, as well as reflections on current experiences. I also utilized my personal cell phone to take notes when I did not have my journals or computer with me and needed to record an experience. The data in this study included past and current written journals

from personal experiences and reflections, previous academic essays I had written, personal notes from classes, and notes from conversations with practitioners and students. The resulting research is important for the field of student affairs and adds value to the body of knowledge for the field. The recommendations made at the end of the discussion provide examples of ways other white women practitioners in student affairs might be able to improve their work with students and at higher education institutions. The recommendations also show the importance of practitioners engaging in reflective praxis such as autoethnography in order to situate themselves in the field of student affairs and understand how their own stories fit in with the culture of their professional field and institution.

### **Ethical Considerations**

While I participated in informal meetings with student affairs practitioners and students on campus, I did not record our conversations or any identifying data about these individuals. Any notes taken during these meetings were kept in a private journal and in my own words, kept only to be a part of my reflection. After each of these meetings, I reflected on how I felt during the conversation, any insights that the individual shared or came up for me during the meeting, and themes between our conversation and the literature. However, there are still important ethical considerations to make even when there is not identifying information or potential for harm. For example, in entering into conversations with undergraduate students, it was important for me to consider my positionality as a graduate student with multiple dominant identities and attend to any power dynamics. For all interviews, it was important that I consider respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout the interview process, no matter how informal it was. Respect for persons involves respecting participants' autonomy and gaining consent from participants to engage in the interviews, beneficence includes maximizing benefit for participants

and minimizing harm, and justice means ensuring a fair distribution of research benefits and burdens (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015).

Because the nature of autoethnographic research is to focus on the self, it is important to apply ethical considerations to oneself in addition to outside participants. As Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) explained,

[a]utoethnography is a way for caring for the self. We often write to work something out for ourselves, and when we do, we must take into account how we care for ourselves, as well as how we experience tension and conflict with others. (p. 62)

Autoethnography is full of benefits for an individual; creating community, giving voice to experiences, and engaging in reflection (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017; Muncey, 2005). However, autoethnography is also a process of both opening wounds and attempting to heal them, and thus requires the researcher to be mindful of how they are taking care of themselves and interacting with others (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari). While autoethnography can provide healing, it is also a method which can pose risks for the researcher, as one is sharing deeply personal and potentially traumatic experiences with readers (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Personal risks should not be taken lightly in this method, and any researcher conducting an autoethnography should consider how they might navigate caring for the self when risks arise.

Within this research, caring for the self involved practicing mindfulness through meditation and yoga practices, as well as attending regular sessions with a therapist to decompress and reflect. Being mindful of my interactions with others meant reflecting on my experiences when I did not behave in a way that I felt was the most authentic version of myself, and it was important to consider what was getting in the way of that. Caring for the self also meant taking a break from the writing and working through my autoethnography in different ways, such as speaking concepts out loud with my important people outside of academia, or

allowing myself to mentally distance myself from it for a short time. Overall, ethically checking in with and taking care of myself throughout the process meant listening, as a researcher, to what my internal participant needed, and attending to those needs to ensure respect for persons, beneficence, and justice for myself.

#### IV. Results

After analyzing my data collected from the self-reflection, self-inventory, self-observation, and external sources, three themes emerged. First, *characteristics of white supremacy* (Okun, 2016) were found in my story. Subthemes of *perfectionism, individualism, and professionalism* were especially relevant. In addition, the *need for validation and desire to be “good”* repetitively showed up in my story. Lastly, there was a theme of *silence* throughout the story. Each of these themes were informed by reflections of memories and experiences in personal journals, previous academic work, and conversations with student affairs practitioners.

##### Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

*“Learning how to be a professional working in higher education involves studying within higher education and learning the culture. We require that people gain... a degree in order to prove their ability to work with students – this process involves being immersed in the academic culture, which is structured around white supremacy... How can student affairs practitioners begin to notice, then challenge structures of white supremacy when they are trained within it and expected, even paid, to uphold it?”* (Personal Journal Entry, November 14, 2019).

The first theme which emerged was the evaluation and discussion of characteristics of white supremacy. Throughout my journals, I often found myself writing about different characteristics of white supremacy culture; sometimes explicitly and sometimes without realizing it until revisiting the journal. I found that I have been socialized since birth to view these characteristics as positive and normal attributes of American culture, and many of them I once considered personal traits I valued about myself. I also found that many of these characteristics seem to be emphasized even more throughout higher education. Practitioners often mentioned how characteristics of white supremacy culture show up in their personal and professional lives, and numerous practitioners brought me a printed copy of Tema Okun’s (2016) document “White Supremacy Culture” as a recommended reading. Throughout my autoethnography, I utilized

Okun's document to evaluate my own understanding of characteristics of white supremacy and how they impact my personal and professional development. While I noticed all characteristics show up in my story at some point, there were a few which were repetitively revealed; perfectionism, individualism, and one which is not on Okun's list but I would personally add, professionalism.

### *Perfectionism*

*"I remember sitting in my office, staring at my computer and only being able to type a few words for an hour. I would erase everything I wrote because it never felt good enough. It got to the day before it was due that I had to make myself keep what I wrote just because I was running out of time"* (Personal Journal Entry, November 26, 2019).

Perfectionism is a characteristic of white supremacy culture which I noticed increase significantly in myself upon attending graduate school. As I felt the pressure to live up to the expectations I had set for myself, as well as the expectations I believed others had for me, my need to perform perfectly in my assistantship, achieve high grades in classes, and balance a perfect life outside of school increased. I realized quickly into graduate school though how my fear of not being perfect was holding me back. When I wrote my first essay for graduate school, I was terrified and spent hours trying to make it perfect. All I had been told about writing in graduate school was that it was different and harder than what I was used to, so I feared my work would be ripped apart. I used every tip and trick I knew about academic writing to make my work seem more appealing. When I received my feedback, my professor told me the essay had a feeling of not being good enough. I felt shocked that my feelings were so well-translated into my writing when I did not mean for them to be, and the professor and I had conversations about what it might mean to extend grace to myself. This experience clearly depicted how my perfectionism was preventing me from doing my best work and being true to myself, and while I

may not have disregarded my internalized perfectionism, I began learning to accept my best being good enough.

Other practitioners also spoke about perfectionism in our conversations. Many of them were able to relate to the feelings I had of being a graduate student and feeling like I was never able to do anything to my fullest extent. Some practitioners spoke about that feeling never going away, while a few practitioners said at some point one must let go of that feeling because it is impossible to please everyone. After reflecting on the conversations with the latter of these practitioners, I think some of them were able to pick up on my quest to find the answer of how to be a near-perfect practitioner. These are some of the conversations which I appreciated the most, because these practitioners focused much of our conversation on what self-care was for them and how they attempted a work-life balance. They asked me questions about how I plan to sustain myself when I enter the workforce and emphasized it is easy to burnout in student affairs when striving for perfection. These conversations helped me reflect more about who I want to be as a professional, but also as someone who does not aim to have life center around work. I continued to learn what extending grace to myself means and to be content with the fact that I cannot do it all.

While my autoethnography helped me realize how much perfectionism was ingrained in me, I was not able to simply let go of it. Even as I write this thesis, I continually struggle to know if it is good enough, or where I hope for it to be. I have been taught to value perfectionism throughout most of my life; as a child it was something my parents always told me made me so special. It is difficult to let go of something which was once something I, and others, valued about myself so highly. Yet I have also learned that allowing myself to be satisfied with the best I can do in the moment provides better results long-term.

*Individualism*

*“I’m feeling like it’s been all on me this term. And I haven’t gotten any appreciation for it – for all I’m trying to do. I’m trying to be the glue holding everything together. But at the same time, I don’t feel like I’m doing enough”* (Personal Journal Entry, December 16, 2019).

I grew up playing team sports and have always considered collaboration as one of my strengths, so when individualism emerged as a theme, I was a bit surprised. When I had previously reviewed the characteristics of white supremacy, I understood how I had been socialized to admire individualism in the culture of the United States, but I had not believed it was something I personally adhered to. But as I was reviewing my story and reviewed Okun’s (2016) characteristics of white supremacy culture document, I found that I act in ways that promote individualism daily. For example, multiple journals mentioned the stress I was feeling because I felt like I was overloaded with responsibilities and task lists. When I reflected on these instances, I also remembered declining help from people and taking on tasks which I could easily share. I found a pattern of feeling like only I could complete certain tasks correctly, and not wanting to burden other people.

Ironically, I instantly thought about group class projects as I evaluated my individualism habits. In my undergraduate experience, I often took on most of the work in group projects, fearful that allowing other people to have control over the project could put my grade in jeopardy. In graduate school, I knew my classmates more, and felt slightly more comfortable sharing the workload. However, I still always volunteered for any task we needed someone to take on, even when I did not have the time or capacity. I told myself it would be best for me to know it was on my own task list and if something were to go wrong it would be my responsibility. Individualism showed up in my conversations with practitioners as well, particularly when they would bring me resources. I found myself feeling slightly agitated,

wondering why they thought I could not find the resource myself, especially if I was already familiar with it. Saying to myself, “I can do it myself” or “I don’t need help” has been my automatic internal response for as long as I can remember, and has even become more ingrained throughout higher education as I have gained more responsibility as an adult and professional.

### *Professionalism*

*“I’ve always been daunted by professionalism standards, deep down knowing they don’t align with who I am and what I value, but in college student affairs provided a new type of professional identity that felt accessible to me. I saw myself and who I could be in that professional world...I saw people like me creating the mold” (Personal Journal Entry, January 19, 2020).*

Professionalism emerged many times throughout my personal journals and reflections, as well as in conversations with practitioners. The concept of professionalism was explicitly mentioned many times in conversation, but the aspects which make up my understanding of professionalism were also referenced. For example, clothing, language, time, and behavior were all features of professionalism which I talked about with practitioners and reflected upon myself. I often wrote about these characteristics as causing me stress and anxiety because I felt they created restrictions and barriers to who I could be in the workplace. I also noticed that my understanding of these characteristics changed over time and in different contexts. For instance, my sense of what constitutes professional behavior changed when I began working in my graduate assistantship and within the environment of Oregon State University. As an undergraduate student at Colorado State University, I had a more relaxed sense of professionalism due to my student status and the culture of the organization and institution which I worked. The culture of my organization and institution at Oregon State was a bit less relaxed, and my professional status set more professional expectations than I had experienced before.

The graduate school process, especially in student affairs, is about teaching one to become a professional in a specific field. One of my goals when entering graduate school was to determine what professionalism means to me and how I would develop my sense of professionalism in student affairs. This process proved to be challenging and frustrating much of the time, because I found that my personal values often did not align with what I was being told professionalism was or was experiencing it to be. In relation to student affairs, I began learning about what professionalism in the field means during my undergraduate education, from student affairs practitioners. The practitioners who were important to me modeled what being a student affairs professional looked like, and because of their mentorship, I decided I wanted to also be a student affairs practitioner. I always felt I would belong in student affairs, and the sense of professionalism felt like something I could grow into. I also now realize many of the professionals I worked with and saw in the field were white women, so I saw my own identities reflected in the field much of the time. Professionalism felt more accessible to me in student affairs because people like me were modeling it daily. However, once I was being trained to be a professional myself, I ran into conflict and had difficulty defining my own sense of professionalism. Professionalism felt political and restrictive, and ultimately led me to question what it means to be a professional working in student affairs and if I could fit the mold.

Talking with practitioners, professors, supervisors, and peers led me to a deeper understanding of professionalism in student affairs. While many people expressed similar concerns that professionalism within student affairs is exclusive and restrictive, many also shared that student affairs is a field which allows great fluidity regarding professionalism and can be institution, organization, and supervisor specific. Overwhelmingly, the advice I received was to spend time deciding what type of professional environment I wanted to work in and to seek

organizations and people which would foster my desire to challenge professional culture and standards. I was reminded of one of the reasons which I was attracted to student affairs; it felt like a profession in which I could be myself and continually develop as a person and professional. I felt lucky to have had mentors who modeled the spectrum of professionalism and taught me how to challenge white supremacy while maintaining professional identities. I learned that professionalism, while a part of white supremacy culture that I might experience as a barrier, is also an essential part of my work as a student affairs practitioner. As a practitioner I have a role to prepare students for their lives and careers outside of higher education, and I believe helping them develop their own sense of professionalism is a part of that. I have the responsibility to challenge norms set by professionalism and help students learn to do the same in their own workplaces so professionalism can continue to be redefined from an aspect of white supremacy to a positive attribute individuals bring to their workplaces. My personal sense of professionalism is still being defined and I hope always will be, but through the autoethnographic process I developed a more positive relationship with what professionalism is and could be, as well as how I can challenge it.

### **The Need for Validation and Desire to be “Good”**

*“You’re just shining. What can I do to make you see how much you shine?’ The question makes me want to cry just thinking about it. So I blush, and don’t say anything. I know there’s nothing she can do anyway” (Personal Journal Entry, March 25, 2020).*

The second theme which emerged in this study was the need for validation. As a part of this theme, I often found the desire of needing to be affirmed that I was completing something the “right” way. Throughout the process of writing and “doing” (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015) my autoethnography I constantly struggled with knowing if I was completing it correctly. I never felt confident that my way of self-reflection was the correct way of completing an

autoethnographic research project, and sought out feedback and external sources to affirm my findings and feelings about my project. It is because of the need for validation that I began meeting with other student affairs practitioners; I did not feel like my own story was enough justification for my findings and I needed data from more experienced professionals.

At points in my reflections when I was strongly questioning my choice to get a degree in student affairs, I also found myself seeking validation from family members, friends, classmates, and largely, student affairs practitioners who had been working in the field for a long time. I disguised meetings with practitioners as networking opportunities for myself, which always left me feeling disappointed and feeling like I was still missing something afterwards. I began to realize, the need for validation was not new; I had been seeking it from people who I labeled as having more authority than me for as long as I could remember, but I largely focused on my relationship of validation and higher education.

One practitioner I met with talked about the relationship between being “good” and being a white woman; after this meeting, and the epiphany this practitioner helped me come to, I felt like I was viewing myself in a new lens. After this conversation I began reviewing my journals and notes from other meetings. I found that the theme of being “good” and being “right” showed up everywhere. In conversations with practitioners, time was often spent discussing what the “right” role was for white women student affairs practitioners to take on and how to “rightfully” serve students of color. There were many conversations about how to be a “good” social justice advocate, and how to educate oneself in the “right” way. Overall, my conversations with practitioners usually centered on how to be “good”, and “better” socially just student affairs practitioners, as if there is a one-size fits all approach. Notably, I always began conversations by asking practitioners about their thoughts of what white women are and are not doing well to

serve students in higher education. Though it was also interesting to note many practitioners seemed to use the pronouns of “we”, “they”, and “you” when discussing what could be better, and rarely used personal pronouns such as “I” or “me”.

Through the self-observation and reflection processes during and after these conversations, I realized I was often seeking validation when meeting with practitioners. I would tell practitioners a brief overview about my own educational and career path, and what led me to the thesis I was working on. Throughout this repetitive process, I found myself searching for affirmation of my chosen thesis topic and method, wanting practitioners to tell me they believed it was a good or necessary topic. In many meetings, practitioners also brought articles and other resources for me to further my learning beyond our conversation. I usually felt slightly offended by this gesture, as my instinct reaction was to feel as if I had said or done something to make them think I had not already done research. This feeling was amplified when the articles were ones which I had already read, and I would find myself wondering what I did or said to make the practitioner believe I was not aware of the specific resource. I later was able to recognize this feeling as a lack of the validation that I so craved, as well as fear that I was not doing something “right” in my personal and professional development.

Once I was able to notice how I was seeking validation for being “good” and making the “right” choices in student affairs, I began to observe how I sought validation in other aspects of my life. I became overwhelmed, and almost disturbed with how often I noticed my seeking of approval from other people. Though what bothered me the most was I could not attribute this desire to anything that had gone “wrong” in my life. I continued searching for an answer to an unsolvable problem and I became burnt out. I took a break from writing and focused my attention anywhere else that I possibly could, trying to ignore the fact that I could not find the

answer for why my need for validation dominated every aspect of my life. When I began writing again, I focused almost all of my attention on the stories, experiences, and advice from the practitioners I met with. I feared writing my own story, because I feared it would not be validated by the academic research which came before me. I feared, and still fear, that my one individual story would not be valid enough to be considered research. However, I struggled to thematize my data in a way that made sense because I was ignoring my own story. I was even disregarding my original intent for utilizing autoethnography as a method, which was to locate my story and individual identity in the field of student affairs. What I could not realize until I began writing my own story, was that my desire for validation is what drove me to focus on an autoethnographic thesis about white women in the first place.

I chose to utilize an autoethnographic approach to my thesis over the summer between my first and second year of graduate school, while I was participating in an internship at a college in Boston. Throughout my internship, I questioned my decision to pursue a career in student affairs because I was not enjoying the work I was doing and had struggled with the same feeling throughout my first year of graduate school. I was struggling with finding my purpose in student affairs, and was realizing I pursued it largely because previous student affairs mentors told me I would be good at it. When I no longer had those mentors so close, validating me and my choices, I felt lost and confused as to why I entered the field. So, I began looking for the answer on my own by conducting an autoethnography. However, when this became difficult, I turned to other people to validate me in my choices; to tell me I was “good” enough.

Even when people did validate me – in my thesis, academic pursuits, and student affairs work – I never fully believed the validation I was receiving. I had practitioners tell me how “interesting” my study was, and to not discount myself, yet I still could not let go of the notion

that I needed more validation to prove my worth. Conducting an autoethnography aims to situate the researcher's story within a particular culture's story, but "doing" autoethnography opens the researcher to epiphanies and self-understanding they might not have had before (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). "Doing" autoethnography taught me that this search for validation from other people will not end until I am able to validate myself and fully believe I am already "good". Throughout my autoethnography I realized I was never satisfied with other people's affirmations because I did not believe them.

### **Silence**

*"I'm sitting at a table of all white professionals, discussing the strategic initiative for the year to better support and retain students of color. I work up the courage to say something about the need to understand how Oregon's white supremacist history affects students' experiences and our work as practitioners. The response from a practitioner is to return to a comment said before. I don't say another word for the entire meeting."* (Personal Journal Entry, November 12, 2019).

The third theme which emerged throughout this study was silence. Silence showed up in my story often, though in different ways. Silence also ties in with the other themes I found, especially the need for validation and being "good". Oftentimes, when reflecting on instances when I felt like I failed to intervene in acts of social injustice, it was because I stayed silent. I found I frequently stayed silent because I did not want to risk tarnishing a "good" image of myself by saying or doing something which might end up making the situation worse. In these cases, I usually felt like I did not know enough information or had enough training to correctly respond and not cause further damage; staying silent felt easier because there was less risk for me. However, I noticed at times I tend to stay silent because I am a quieter person, and I genuinely enjoy listening to people and learning from them. Through the self-reflection and observation processes, I had to repeatedly ask myself when I was using silence as a mechanism

to avoid speaking up, or when it was a true reflection of who I am. The answer was rarely clear, and often I decided both could be true for each experience.

I also reflected upon my relationship to silence as woman; in times when I have failed to interrupt acts of social injustice, I also found that many times there was a power dynamic in relation to gender, and sometimes age. When such power dynamics were present, I found myself fearing lack of validation if I spoke up, which made it easier to stay silent. I also tended to fear looking incompetent or being wrong in these situations, and stayed silent to avoid making myself look foolish. When I spoke with practitioners, multiple white women brought up silence as something they felt more white women needed to reflect on. Two practitioners even brought me a printed copy of a book chapter about silence written by Robin DiAngelo (2016). Before my conversations with practitioners, I had reflected on my use of silence some, but not much. I had thought about silence as a tool often utilized by white people to avoid conversations about race or to disengage with realities of racism, but after meeting with practitioners, I felt there was more to silence that I had not understood yet.

I began thinking about my personal relationship with silence; as an introvert I am comfortable with silence and sometimes prefer it. I learned in high school that when speaking in front of a group of people who I do not feel comfortable or trusting of yet, my thoughts are disorganized and I ramble. I decided early on that staying quiet until I had the chance to gather my thoughts and listen to other people would be best for everyone. But this unfortunately led me to never feeling ready enough to speak up, and the trend continued beyond high school. It only worsened once I learned about identities and power dynamics and became hyper-focused on not taking too much space in conversations, and became fearful of the stereotypes people might assume of me due to any of my identities. I also realized silence was familiar for me, because I

had been socialized into being silent when I did not have the answers or was in a lower position of authority.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this autoethnography, three themes emerged: the need for validation and desire to be “good”, characteristics of white supremacy culture, including perfectionism, individualism, and professionalism, and silence. Characteristics of white supremacy culture were revealed repeatedly throughout my story, showing how dominant these characteristics are in higher education. Evaluating perfectionism uncovered how highly I valued perfectionism as a character trait, which allowed it to inhibit me from being kind to myself and recognize when I was giving my best. Assessing how I value and perpetuate individualism brought me to accept truths which I had ignored before, such as declining help and attempting to maintain control over everything I could. Learning more about my understanding of professionalism challenged me to consider who I want to be as a professional in student affairs and how I will work to dismantle oppressive structures of professionalism. The need for validation and desire to be “good” is depicted by constant self-doubt and seeking of approval from higher authorities. This theme also revealed that validation from external sources will not serve my best interests as I must be able to validate myself. The theme of silence was important to my story as it revealed how I have been socialized to remain silent in situations which I do not trust my own knowledge or voice. Each of these themes revealed different truths about myself and socialization, and in the next chapter I will analyze how these affect my work as a white woman practitioner in student affairs.

## **V. Discussion**

Characteristics of white supremacy culture, including perfectionism, individualism, and professionalism, the need to be validated and desire to be “good”, and silence are all themes which emerged in this autoethnography. Throughout this discussion, each theme is analyzed in relation to my identities as a white woman and student affairs practitioner. Each theme reveals connections between socialized whiteness, socialized womanhood, and my identity as a white woman. While each theme provides different insights, a common thread of disconnection from the self exists throughout each concept.

### **Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture**

As a white person, I have been socialized to value characteristics of white supremacy culture and view them as normal, and even positive aspects of American culture (Gusa, 2010; Jensen, 2005; Okun, 2016). I am frequently reminding myself of this fact, as these characteristics have been amplified throughout my experience in higher education. I have found constant tension as a student and practitioner as I attempt to unlearn these characteristics for myself yet study and work within an environment in which they are highly valued. Perfectionism, individualism, and professionalism are particularly relevant characteristics to my story and experiences in higher education. Evaluating each of these characteristics offered me insight into the differences between how I desire to work to dismantle systems of power and oppression and how I actually behave to do so. I learned I cannot truly advance social justice while also striving for perfection, upholding myths of individualism for myself and others, and adhering to oppressive professionalism standards.

*Perfectionism*

I once was asked to describe a time I had failed, and I could not think of anything other than burning cookies in the oven. I knew I had failed more than that one small mistake, but I literally could not think of anything. Failure was so negative that it was as if I blocked all of my failures out of my life. As I revisited this question for my autoethnography, I instead challenged myself to recall mistakes I had made and was overcome with embarrassment and shame every time I recalled a moment which I had made a mistake. While remembering mistakes was difficult and painful, remembering failures was impossible. Failure to me meant something far worse, while a mistake was something I could fix. Failure meant I had not succeeded.

Perfectionism has dominated the majority of my life, and taking on the identity of a perfectionist was something I used to be very pleased about. Being a perfectionist meant everyone saw me as someone who did not quit and always worked hard; and hopefully harder than everyone else, because striving for perfection meant I was striving to be the best. Perfectionism has taught me that I should always have a goal in mind and if I do not achieve my goals, then I have failed. I now believe aiming for perfection has taught me to never be satisfied with anything less, which has repetitively caused the fear of failure, doubt of myself and abilities, and a lack of self-love. I have been battled with the monster of perfectionism almost every day I have worked on this autoethnographic project. I have repetitively told myself that my work, my story, and my thoughts are not good enough, and have added pages and pages of outlines with ideas I will not have the space or time to write. Each of these ideas created with the intent to make this thesis contain every answer I have searched for; to make it perfect.

I believe my socialization as a white woman is strongly connected to my internalized perfectionism. It has already been established that perfectionism is a characteristic of white

supremacy culture (Okun, 2016), and therefore as a socialized white person, I have received messages that perfectionism is a positive attribute. As a woman, I have been bombarded with messages of how to look, feel, eat, dress, and act in order to achieve societal standards of who I should be. These messages have caused me to believe I must set and achieve higher standards for myself, and have resulted in disordered eating, searching for validation in external sources, and low self-esteem. Interestingly, most of the literature about women's internalized perfectionism focuses on the relationship between perfectionism and disordered eating (Forbush, Heatherton, & Keel, 2007; Minarik & Ahrens, 1996; Pliner & Haddock, 1996). As a white woman, perfection has been the impossible standard I have been taught to work towards throughout my life and has only provided me with negative results. Evaluating how my sense of self is tied to perfectionism is essential in order to treat myself with kindness and grace, and to understand how I perpetuate white supremacy on a regular basis.

I also believe the desire to achieve perfection as a white woman is closely related to why I chose to pursue student affairs as a career. Constantly striving for perfection has allowed me to believe I can find answers to every question and problem I encounter; it has allowed me to incorrectly believe I can find a way to fix any situation as long as I work hard enough. As an undergraduate student, I learned that the United States, as well as American higher education, was built upon the foundation of white supremacy (Wilder, 2013). I learned that as a result, white people should be responsible for creating change in oppressive structures and institutions. I interacted with white women who were working for social and racial justice in higher education and believed student affairs must be my solution to fix inequities in higher education.

Perfectionism has been instilled in me as a positive and important characteristic to possess but has led to disappointment and an inability to appreciate the beauty which can come

from failure. Attempting to let go of perfectionism has encouraged me to be content with doing and being my best in a given moment, and to accept that not every problem has an answer which I can solve. However, I know unlearning perfectionism is a journey which will continue to occur, as it is deeply ingrained in me. As a practitioner, I hope to serve as an example for students and help them understand that the expectations of perfectionism are unrealistic. I also hope to identify policies and structures in the organizations and institutions I will work in which encourage students to live up to perfectionism. I believe I have a responsibility as a practitioner to assist students in learning from mistakes and to provide space for reflection, not to perpetuate fearful perspectives of failure.

### *Individualism*

Meritocracy is a popular and powerful myth in the United States (Harro, 2000; Helms, 1994, 1995; Okun, 2016). The belief that each individual has the ability to control their own destiny simply by working hard and following outlined rules permeates the minds of white people and people of color in the country (Harro). I am no exception to this socialization and have been taught to place high value in personal accountability, competition, and the idea that a strong work ethic can lead to the perfect life. Ironically, when I first began journaling for this project, I wrote about what a difficult journey it had been, and continues to be, to locate my individual participation in white supremacy. I remembered a training I had attended where I was asked what it means to be white and could not think of an answer, even though I lived every day of my life being white. Until I began to focus on myself as a racialized, white person, I could not understand how I was and am complicit in white supremacy. Helms (1994) explained this phenomenon as true for many white Americans, as “in this society, one learns to act White, but not to *be* White” (p. 9, emphasis in original). If white people understood what it meant to *be*

white, then the idea of individualism would have to be acknowledged as a fallacy because *being* white means acknowledging that white people are privileged and white supremacy is the foundation of the United States.

As a student affairs practitioner, I believe my responsibility is to share my story with students to help them unlearn individualism. I have witnessed white students struggle to locate their own participation in white supremacy and have found that sharing my own experiences as examples can be helpful. Similarly, I have observed white practitioners fail to locate their own complicity in white supremacy and subsequently fail in helping white students do so. In these moments, various distancing mechanisms are usually employed, and blame is placed on other white people who are not present. These experiences serve as an example of social justice education which does not encourage white students to analyze their own racialized subjectivity (Bonnett, 1996). Sharing my story might also assist students in recognizing the negative aspects of individualism and the positive features of collectivism. Because higher education is founded in white supremacy (Wilder, 2013) and promotes white supremacy culture (Okun, 2016), students may learn that their academic and career outcomes are a result of only their work and decisions.

### *Professionalism*

Professionalism is often described as a positive characteristic to possess and is even a highly sought-after competency by employers and recruiters (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020). However, my own experiences have taught me that professionalism is a fluid concept which can be influenced by geographic location, organization, and other individuals. My experiences have also taught me that professionalism can be oppressive or an identity which one creates. In student affairs, I have learned professionalism usually means being

a part of professional organizations, adhering to and advancing national professional competencies, and continuing professional development throughout one's career (Eanes, et al., 2015; Fried, 2011). Learning this spectrum of professionalism has allowed me to begin cultivating my own professional identity, as well as consider my role as a student affairs practitioner in modeling professionalism for students.

As a part of my role to help students, I as a practitioner have a responsibility to model my own professional identity and encourage students to create their own. It is especially important to evaluate how the environment of higher education and the oppressive structures which it is built upon affect my own and students' understanding of professionalism (Wilder, 2013). As a white woman I have been socialized to value aspects of professionalism which are oppressive, and as I continue to cultivate my own professional identity I must remain vigilant and notice when I am perpetuating such structures (Okun, 2016). I believe it is equally important to assist students in deconstructing and redefining professionalism so they can feel empowered to challenge oppressive ideas of professionalism when leaving higher education.

### **The Need for Validation and Desire to be “Good”**

As I attempted to better understand my need for validation and how it relates to my work as a practitioner, I reflected upon some of my most impactful mentorship experiences with student affairs professionals during my undergraduate education. Two relationships stood out to me as especially important, both of whom were supervisors when I was working on the student programming board. Each of these supervisors became mentors to me whom I highly respected and still maintain relationships with. As a student and employee, it was very important to me for them to affirm the work I did and let me know I was valued. I also sought validation from them when I was going through major personal and academic development, such as changing my

major and developing beliefs of my own. If I did not receive validation from my supervisors, I questioned if I was doing something incorrectly or making the wrong choice; lack of validation was equivalent to failing.

I believe a large part of this need for validation stems from my identity as a white woman. As a white person, I have been socialized to be fearful of failure and to value perfectionism (Jensen, 2005; Okun, 2016). I have also been socialized to believe there is a “good/bad binary” (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018) of racism, and as long as I am not overtly racist, then I am a “good” person. As a woman, I have been socialized to place value in authority and not trust my own voice (Belenkey et al., 1986). Each of these aspects of socialization allowed me to create unrealistic expectations for myself and to place high value on other people’s affirmation, or lack thereof, towards me.

As I began learning about my own identities and becoming more passionate about social justice efforts, I sought validation for being a “good” social justice advocate or a “good” white person. Part of being “good” meant attempting to fix racism for people of color, believing that it was my responsibility as a white person. At this point of my white identity development, I would place myself in the fourth status of Helms’ (1995) model: pseudoindependence. Helms describes this status as a point in which the white person feels the need to help people of color. Locating myself in this status is consistent with the literature on anti-racist education in higher education, which often fails to teach white students how they are personally a part of white supremacy (Blackwell, 2010; Bonnett, 1996; Schick, 2010). While I believe the social justice education I was engaged in early on was very helpful and important to my identity development, I think it lacked a focus on race because I did not understand how I was personally implicated in white supremacy.

When I decided to pursue a career in student affairs, I was drawn by the idea of helping students, a core aspect of the profession (Reynolds, 2008, 2011). I was also excited about pursuing a career which valued social justice and diversity (Eanes et al., 2015; Evans & Reason, 2001). I am now able to realize that I was also drawn to the idea of being able to fix racism for students of color and to work within a profession which I would be validated for my efforts in advancing social justice. I also believe I have been taught as a white woman to value the helping professions as I have been socialized to believe I should take care of people (Miller & Garran, 2008). Unfortunately, there is little literature on the connection between the helping professions, race, and gender, and this area should be explored more in-depth. While I do still believe helping and social justice are important values to student affairs, I wonder how many white women practitioners were attracted to the profession with intentions which may be problematic. Reflecting on my own experience with my two supervisors, I am grateful for the way they offered a level of challenge and support to allow me to trust my own internal voice. As the next section will explore, developing a voice was integral to not only resisting the need for validation, but for combatting the comfort of silence.

### **Silence**

Silence emerged as a theme throughout my story, and I often found I used silence as a distancing mechanism to avoid taking part in uncomfortable discussions about race. I often used excuses for myself when remaining silent, such as believing I did not have enough knowledge or training in order to be a part of the conversation. I also feared saying or doing something which might be wrong, and decided it would be best for everyone to remain silent. Such excuses have been recorded by multiple researchers as distancing mechanisms frequently used by white people (Cabrera, 2018; Case & Hemmings, 2005; DiAngelo, 2016, 2018). Researchers have also argued

that white people use silence to remain in control over conversations and maintain images as “good” white people (Case & Hemmings; DiAngelo, 2016). In a chapter about white silence, DiAngelo noted, “[w]hen our identity as good people is contingent on not seeing our racism, we will need to keep it protected and intact” (2016, p. 296). My experiences of remaining silent in order to avoid making mistakes and being seen as a bad person is consistent with researchers’ previous findings on white silence and distancing mechanisms. Every time I made the choice to engage in silence, I allowed myself to believe I was separate from racialization and white supremacy.

While I have learned from the times I have engaged in silence and hope to change this behavior in the future, I also must acknowledge the personal development and power dynamics which have influenced many experiences of silence. Most of the memories which I have of using silence to distance myself from race occurred early in my undergraduate education and during my first year of graduate school. During both of these times in my life I would place myself in the perspective of received knowing (Belenkey et al., 1986). Early in my undergraduate career when I was beginning to learn about systems of power and oppression, I was starting to question authority, but I searched for answers from other individuals who I labeled as having knowledge, such as mentors and supervisors. I did not recognize myself as someone who could synthesize information myself and share my experiences as valid because I had not developed the ability to trust my own voice yet. Thus, especially in conversations about race, I believed I must remain silent and learn from sources of authority. Although, the people I had identified as my sources of authority were typically white student affairs practitioners.

While I learned to trust my voice over time, early in graduate school I moved back to the perspective of received knowing (Belenkey et al., 1986) due to the amount of change and doubt I

was experiencing. Again, I sought authority in student affairs practitioners and professors, feeling that the voice I had developed over the previous few years as a student might not have been the voice I needed as a professional. I believed my role as a graduate student was to listen and learn, and often felt I did not have enough experience or knowledge to back up my thoughts. These feelings were amplified when I was working with mid- and upper-level professionals, as I wanted to be viewed as competent. Silence often seemed like a better option than potentially making a mistake and being perceived as incompetent. Often in these situations, race and white supremacy was not discussed, and I remained silent, telling myself that practitioners who have more knowledge and experience than me would bring it up if it was relevant to the topic. The silence I utilized in situations which I felt incompetent served as distancing mechanisms for evaluating how I, as well as my colleagues, were each a part of the perpetuation of white supremacy in higher education and student affairs.

### **Gluing the Pieces Back Together and Creating a New Image**

Analyzing the themes presented in the characteristics of white supremacy culture, need for validation and desire to be “good”, and silence revealed aspects of my socialization and truths which I had not been able to realize until completing the autoethnographic process. While each theme presented differences, there were similarities threaded throughout the stories, analysis, and conclusions which were drawn from each theme. Each theme presented an element of me being disconnected from myself, and often searching for a way to reconnect my mind, body, and soul as one. As a white person I have learned to maintain disconnection from my feelings and to trust rationale, logic, and procedures instead of emotions and personal experiences (DiAngelo, 2018; Okun, 2016). As a woman I have been socialized to place my trust in authority figures and remain silent (Belenkey et al., 1986). Being socialized to not trust my own emotions and

voice has contributed to a disconnection which I have not before been able to name. Each theme reveals how I as a racialized and gendered white woman have been socialized to separate myself from my humanity in order to uphold heteropatriarchy and white supremacy (Allen, 2004; Smith, 2006).

Throughout the graduate school application, acceptance, and completion processes, I was repeatedly taught that a significant part of student affairs practitioners' roles is to support the development and experiences of historically underrepresented and marginalized students. I do not disagree with this belief and in fact, it still drives much of the reasoning behind my work. However, I believe if white women in student affairs, including myself, fail to examine the need to be "good" and to be validated, internalized white supremacy characteristics, and use of silence, we will cause more harm than benefit to students. I also believe failing to evaluate these aspects of white womanhood would be a disservice to students with dominant identities, as opportunities to assist them in similar reflection will be lost.

One of the original goals of this autoethnography was to locate my own story within the culture of student affairs. I was especially curious to learn about my story as a white woman student affairs practitioner in relation to other white women practitioners. Through reflecting on my own experiences and discussions with and about white women in student affairs with other practitioners, I have come to believe white women working in student affairs have similar experiences to my own prior to and during their careers. I have found our stories differ however, when white women practitioners either choose to begin learning about and acknowledging their own participation in white supremacy or not. Addressing structures of power and oppression can be daunting, but I also believe it is an essential aspect of my work as a practitioner working in higher education. I believe I cannot effectively serve students without recognizing and working

to deconstruct the oppressive structures which higher education was founded within (Wilder, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

As previously mentioned, white women comprise majority of the practitioners in student affairs (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). While my story is only mine, socialized experiences of white women are similar and are relevant to consider in recommendations to practitioners. Characteristics of white supremacy culture thrive in the higher education environment, and practitioner must question their role in participating and dismantling such structures for the sake of students, colleagues, and themselves. The desire for validation and need to be “good” causes white people to believe in a “good/bad” binary of racism and disassociate themselves from the participation in white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). Practitioners working in student affairs who seek validation for their social justice efforts will only end up causing further harm to students of color. Lastly, silence is a developmental perspective for many white women, and can result in difficulty gaining and trusting a personal voice (Belenkey et al., 1986). When this silence interacts with white silence, white women perpetuate systems of oppression and fail to evaluate their participation in white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2016). Because the American higher education system has been built to advance whiteness (Wilder, 2013), white women practitioners’ silence advances white supremacy and fails to serve students of color.

## VI. Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, this question was posed: How does my personal understanding of white womanhood affect my work and role as a student affairs practitioner? By evaluating themes including characteristics of white supremacy culture, the need for validation and desire to be “good”, and silence, I determined that my understanding of white womanhood is heavily influenced by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. I believe my role as a student affairs practitioner is to assist white students in their own development of racial identities, and to model ways to deconstruct white supremacy and other systems of oppression. Future research should examine the relationship between white women pursuing careers in the helping professions and the white savior complex. The history of the helping professions is important to consider when evaluating why white women are so prevalent in student affairs, yet few researchers have discussed the historical relationship between socialized identity and helping professions. In addition, future research should evaluate the intersection of whiteness and womanhood in various settings, as the literature on experiences of white women is limited.

Based off of these conclusions, there are multiple recommendations for student affairs practitioners. The first recommendation for practitioners is to evaluate the multicultural or antiracist education practices they utilize to educate students on identity and race. As previously mentioned, student affairs is considered a helping profession (Reynolds, 2008). Student affairs practitioners have a responsibility to assist students in their personal development so they leave the institution as well-rounded and members of society (Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Thelin & Gasman, 2011). One way which student affairs practitioners often attempt to help students in identity development is by utilizing multicultural or antiracist education practices to teach students about social justice and identity (Case & Hemmings, 2005). Student populations are

becoming more and more diverse, yet many white students are still coming to college with very little knowledge about race and the oppression which their peers of color face within and outside of the institution (Blackwell, 2010). The education practices often utilized by, namely white, practitioners tend to work in educating white students about identity, but come at the cost of students of color (Blackwell; Bonnett, 1996). Practitioners have a responsibility to educate students but must remember that antiracist education should not be solely for the benefit of educating white students on privilege, and should not have a goal of protecting white feelings (Blackwell).

The second recommendation to practitioners is to engage in an ongoing reflective process, such as autoethnography, in order to evaluate one's personal participation in white supremacy, particularly within higher education. This recommendation is especially important for white practitioners. "Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 57). White practitioners cannot serve students of color effectively if they have not assessed their own participation in white supremacy (Blackwell, 2010). Moreover, practitioners cannot aim to educate white students on their own racialization without having truly reflected on it themselves (Bonnett, 1996; Schick, 2010).

Third, when working with white students, white women practitioners must ask ourselves, *what does it look like for me to create a brave space for white women to come to me with questions, concerns, and thoughts? What is my role in giving validation, or not, in this moment?* If white women practitioners can provide space for white students to bring forward what might be deemed offensive or problematic questions in a controlled environment, white students may be able to learn more about their racialized subjectivity with someone who has a

similar experience racially. Practitioners can utilize their education and training to evaluate how to both challenge and support students in order to facilitate development. In addition, practitioners can provide resources for further learning which do not come at the detriment of students or colleagues of color.

Lastly, I must consider recommendations to myself, as this autoethnography evaluated my story. I now know that characteristics of white supremacy culture, the need for validation and desire to be “good”, and silence are each a part of my story and therefore impact who I am and the decisions I make. While I seek to unravel the internalized messages from my socialization, I also understand that these traits may stick with me throughout my life. As a practitioner, I recommend that I continually engage in self-reflection and observation throughout my career. I have come to understand that my story will continue to evolve in relation to the culture and story of student affairs, and it will be important to regularly evaluate this relationship. I also recommend that I sustain and even improve the practice of being forgiving to myself for my mistakes. Evaluating perfectionism has revealed a difficulty for me to extend grace to myself, yet going through the autoethnographic process has encouraged me to confront mistakes and find forgiveness for myself. I find it important to remind myself that the ways I have been socialized are not my fault, and while I have a responsibility to unlearn these aspects of socialization to advance social justice, I also have a responsibility to unlearn this socialization to free myself.

There were three goals identified at the beginning of the study: (1) to encourage more white woman student affairs practitioners to engage in personal reflection about their racial and gender identities and how these identities relate to higher education; (2) to critically evaluate how I have been socialized as a white woman to understand my own privilege and marginalization in a United States context; (3) to identify ways in which white women student

affairs practitioners can better work with white women students on the intersection of racial and gender identity development. The first goal is one which is hopeful for my future work in student affairs, as I plan to use the insights from this study to inform my work with colleagues. The second goal was achieved by using an autoethnographic methodology to reflect on my identity as a white woman. The third goal was achieved after analyzing the results which emerged from the autoethnographic process. The findings and analysis presented in this autoethnography provide insight into my socialization as a white woman student affairs practitioner and how these identities affect my work as a practitioner. White women student affairs practitioners have a significant role in higher education, and by utilizing an autoethnographic method, can better understand how to serve students while working within an institution built to advance white supremacy.

## References

- Accapadi, M. M. (2007). When white women cry: How white women's tears oppress women of color. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 26(2), 208-215.
- Adams, T. E., & Jones, S. H. (2008). Autoethnography is queer. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (Eds.) *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies* (pp. 373-390). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Adams, T. E., Jones, S. H., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.
- Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (2005). The identity career of the graduate student: Professional socialization to academic sociology. *The American Sociologist*, 36, 11-27.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Allen, R. L. (2004). Whiteness and critical pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36(2), 121-136.
- Ashlee, A. A., Zamora, B., & Karikari, S. N. (2017). We are woke: A collaborative critical autoethnography of three "womxn" of color graduate students in higher education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 19(1), 89-104. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v19i1.1259>
- Belenkey, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. Basic Books.
- Blackwell, D. M. (2010). Sidelines and separate spaces: Making education anti-racist for students of color. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13(4), 473-494.
- Bonnett, A. (1996). Anti-racism and the critique of 'white' identities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 22(1), 97-110.
- Broido, E. M. (2000). The development of social justice allies during college: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 3-18.
- Cabrera, N. L. (2014). Exposing whiteness in higher education: White male college students minimizing racism, claiming victimization, and recreating white supremacy. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(1), 30-55.
- Cabrera, N. L. (2018). *White guys on campus: Racism, white immunity, and the myth of "post-racial" higher education*. Rutgers University Press.
- Case, K. A., & Hemmings, A. (2005). Distancing strategies: White women preservice teachers and antiracist curriculum. *Urban Education*, 40(6), 606-626.
- Cormier, S. (2016). *Counseling strategies and interventions for professional helpers* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Crawley, S. L. (2012). Autoethnography as feminist self-interview. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (pp. 143-160). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Crenshaw, C. (1997). Resisting whiteness' rhetorical silence. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(3), 253-278.
- Denshire, S. (2013). Autoethnography. *Sociopedia.isa*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/205684601351>
- DiAngelo, R. J. (2011). White fragility. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54-70.

- DiAngelo, R. J. (2016). *What does it mean to be white? Developing white racial literacy*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- DiAngelo, R. J. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- Dungy, G., & Gordon, S. A. (2011). The development of student affairs. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 61-79). Jossey-Bass.
- Eanes, B. J., Perillo, P. A., Fechter, T., Gordon, S. A., Harper, S., Havice, P., et al. (2015). Professional competency areas for student affairs educators [PDF File]. Retrieved from [https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA\\_NASPA\\_Professional\\_Compencies\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Compencies_FINAL.pdf)
- Evans, N. J., & Reason, R. D. (2001). Guiding principles: A review and analysis of student affairs philosophical statements. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42, 359-377.
- Forbush, K., Heatherton, T. F., & Keel, P. K. (2007). Relationships between perfectionism and specific disordered eating behaviors. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 40(1), 37-41.
- Fried, J. (2011). Ethical standards and principles. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 96-119). Jossey-Bass.
- Gusa, D. L. (2010). White institutional presence: The impact of whiteness on campus climate. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(4), 464-489.
- Harro, B. (2000). The cycle of socialization. In M. Adams, W. Blumenfeld, R. Castañeda, H. Hackman, M. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.) *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism* (pp.15-21). Routledge.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms's white and people of color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Sage.
- Helms, J. E. (1994). *A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a white person or understanding the white persons in your life*. Content Communications.
- Jensen, R. (2005). *The heart of whiteness: Confronting race, racism, and white privilege*. City Lights Publishers.
- Kailin, J. (2002). *Antiracist education: From theory to practice*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Kelan, E. K. (2010). Gender logic and (un)doing gender at work. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 17(2), 174-194.
- Linder, C. (2015). Navigating guilt, shame, and fear of appearing racist: A conceptual model of antiracist white feminist identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(6), 535-550.
- Love, P. G., & Guthrie, V. L. (1999). Women's ways of knowing. *New Directions for Student Services*, 88, 17-27.
- Magnet, S. (2006). Protesting privilege: An autoethnographic look at whiteness. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(4), 736-749. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406218617>
- Mawhinney, J. L. (1998). Giving up the ghost, disrupting the (re) production of white privilege in anti-racist pedagogy and organizational change. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/12096>

- McEwen, M. K., Engstrom, C. M., & Williams, T. E. (1990). Gender diversity within the student affairs profession. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31, 47-53.
- McEwen, M. K., Williams, T. E., & Engstrom, C. M. (1991). Feminization in student affairs: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 32, 440-446.
- McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identity with white teachers*. SUNY Press.
- Miller, J. L., & Garran, A. M. (2008). *Racism in the United States: Implications for the helping professions*. Cengage.
- Minarik, M. L., & Ahrens, A. H. (1996). Relations of eating behavior and symptoms of depression and anxiety to the dimensions of perfectionism among undergraduate women. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 20, (155-169).
- Muncey, T. (2005). Doing autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 4(1), 69-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690500400105>
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020). *Career Readiness Defined*. NACE Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition. <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>
- Okun, T. (2016). *White Supremacy Culture*. dRworks. <https://resourcegeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2016-dRworks-workbook.pdf>
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Jossey-Bass.
- Pliner, P., & Haddock, G. (1995). Perfectionism in weight-concerned and –unconcerned women: An experimental approach. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 19(4), 381-389.
- Poon, O. A. (2018). Ending white innocence in student affairs and higher education. *Journal of student affairs*, XXVII, 13-21.
- Pope, R. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2011). Multicultural competence. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 337-352). Jossey-Bass.
- Pritchard, A., & McChesney, J. (2018). Focus on student affairs, 2018: Understanding key challenges using CUPA-HR data. *College and University Professional Association for Human Resources*. Retrieved from [https://www.cupahr.org/wpcontent/uploads/Student\\_Affairs\\_Report.pdf](https://www.cupahr.org/wpcontent/uploads/Student_Affairs_Report.pdf)
- Reason, R. D. & Broido, E. M. (2011). Philosophies and values. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 80-95). Jossey-Bass.
- Reynolds, A. L. (2008). *Helping college students: Developing essential support skills for student affairs practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Reynolds, A. L. (2011). Counseling and helping skills. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 399-412). Jossey-Bass.
- Roper, L. D. & Whitt, E. J. (2016). What troubles you? What keeps you up at night? In E. J. Whitt, L. D. Roper, K. T. Porterfield, & J. E. Carnaghi (Eds.), *Angst and hope: Current issues in student affairs leadership* (pp. 19-37). Jossey-Bass.
- Schick, C. (2000). “By Virtue of Being White”: Resistance in anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 3(1), 83–101.
- Selzer, R., Evans-Phillips, J., & Johnson, M. (2017). Stepping up to talk about race: Race-conscious leadership in higher ed. *Women in Higher Education*, 26(10), 1-3.

- Smith, A. (2006). Heteropatriarchy and the pillars of white supremacy: Rethinking women of color organizing. *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, 66-73.
- Taber, N. (2010). Institutional ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative: An argument for incorporating multiple methodologies. *Qualitative Research*, 10(1), 5–25.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109348680>
- Taub, D. J., & McEwen, M. K. (2006). Decision to enter the profession of student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(2), 206-216.
- Thelin, J. R., & Gasman, M. (2011). Historical overview of American higher education. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (pp. 3-23). Jossey-Bass.
- Wilder, C. S. (2013). *Ebony & ivy: Race, slavery, and the troubled history of America's universities*. Bloomsbury Press.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry, November 12, 2019.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry. November 14, 2019.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry, November 26, 2019.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry, December 16, 2019.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry, January 19, 2020.
- Woods, J. Personal Journal Entry, March 25, 2020.