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Critiquing the Soul of White Supremacy and the Spiritualities of Whiteness: Narrative and Everyday Praxis

Abstract

This dissertation argues that whiteness and the oppressive structures it creates are maintained, managed, and justified by the religio-cultural tools of white Christians in greater Fort Wayne, IN. This dissertation studies the relationship among the repertoires of white Christians, racism, and white privilege by analyzing the life narratives of selfidentified white Christians. I have divided this work into two parts. Part one, comprising Chapters One and Two, outlines the frameworks, theories, and methods I use to analyze the life narratives of the white Christians that I interviewed. In Chapter One I focus on how my research builds on and contributes to the conversations started by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in their trail-blazing book, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Chapter One outlines the significant conclusions made by these scholars, names the criticisms leveled against Emerson and Smith, and states the thesis and assumptions of my work. In Chapter Two I outline frameworks for understanding how cultural and religious tool kits influence interpersonal narratives. Here I'm concerned with the role of cultural and religious repertoires, especially narratives, in the construction of identity and religious beliefs as well as the use of narrative as a method of inquiry and analysis. In the first part of Chapter Two, I argue that dominant cultural and religious repertoires influence personal beliefs that in turn (re)construct cultural and religious repertoires. In the latter part of the chapter, I define narrative inquiry and argue for the legitimacy of its use as a methodology for collecting my research data. Against this background of arguments of narrative identity and cultural tools, Chapters Three and Four, part two, examines the life narratives of twenty research participants and names the religio-cultural tools articulated by these and many other white Christians.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Ph.D.

Department

Religious and Theological Studies

First Advisor

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Second Advisor

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Keywords

Church, Racism, Whiteness, White privilege

Subject Categories

Religion | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Publication Statement

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CRITIQUING THE SOUL OF WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE SPIRITUALITIES
OF WHITENESS:
NARRATIVE AND EVERYDAY PRAXIS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Dean J. Johnson
November 2010
Advisor: Dr. George 'Tink' Tinker

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This dissertation argues that whiteness and the oppressive structures it creates are maintained, managed, and justified by the religio-cultural tools of white Christians in greater Fort Wayne, IN. This dissertation studies the relationship among the repertoires of white Christians, racism, and white privilege by analyzing the life narratives of self-identified white Christians. I have divided this work into two parts. Part one, comprising Chapters One and Two, outlines the frameworks, theories, and methods I use to analyze the life narratives of the white Christians that I interviewed. In Chapter One I focus on how my research builds on and contributes to the conversations started by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in their trail-blazing book, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Chapter One outlines the significant conclusions made by these scholars, names the criticisms leveled against Emerson and Smith, and states the thesis and assumptions of my work. In Chapter Two I outline frameworks for understanding how cultural and religious tool kits influence interpersonal narratives. Here I'm concerned with the role of cultural and religious repertoires, especially narratives, in the construction of identity and religious beliefs as well as the use of narrative as a method of inquiry and analysis. In the first part of Chapter Two, I argue that dominant cultural and religious repertoires influence personal beliefs that in turn (re)construct cultural and religious repertoires. In the latter part of the chapter, I define narrative inquiry and argue for the legitimacy of its use as a methodology for collecting my research data. Against this background of arguments of narrative identity and cultural tools, Chapters Three and Four, part two, examines the life narratives of twenty research participants and names the religio-cultural tools articulated by these and many other white Christians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. George ‘Tink’ Tinker, Dr. Edward Antonio, and Dr. Nancy Wadsworth for their encouragement, feedback, and especially their work over the summer of 2010. I would especially like to thank Dr. Wadsworth for her suggestions related to the organization of my work. In addition to my official committee, I would like to share my great appreciation for three colleagues and friends who served as an ad-hoc processing committee: Matt Guynn, Dr. Scott Holland, and Dr. Dena Pence. The writing of my dissertation would not have been possible without the editing work done by several individuals: Eric Larson, Matt Guynn, Elizabeth KimJin Collardey, Jan Fairchild, David Fairchild, Todd Comer, Sandra Golden, Ann Ott, Mia Miller, Steve Clapp, Julie Garber, Carla Kilgore, and Bill Kilgore. I greatly appreciate their time and efforts. Several colleagues and friends lent support in my times of need and in the chaos of doing the research and writing. I am grateful for their contributions and would like to thank: the Beacon Heights Church community, Malinda Berry, Cheryl Blankenship, Steve Clapp, Terry Clark, my colleagues at Defiance College, my extended family, my colleagues at Goshen College, Jan Fairchild, Rachel Harding, Vincent Harding, Dwight Hopkins, Denny Johnson, Dion Johnson, Sara Lane, S. Lily Mendoza, John Ott, Kim Overdyck, Jim Perkinson, Jerry Peterson, Ross Peterson-Veach, Marian Plant, Ruby Sales, Regina Shands-Stolzfus, Anita Stalter, and John Yordy.

My research would not have been possible without the kindness of those who willingly participated as interviewees. Thank you all for your honesty and your time. My heartfelt thanks to everyone whose names I did not mention, but who contributed in any form towards the successful completion of the dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Melissa Bennett and Jude Bennett-Johnson. Thank you both for allowing me the space to read and write even when on breaks and vacation. Thank you for loving me throughout and through this process. We did it!

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INTRODUCTION

There is an urgent need for white Christians to honestly assess and address how our religion fosters racism, white privilege, and ongoing oppression. It is only when we start to be honest about how being white impacts our faith that we can eliminate those religious narratives and practices that (re)create oppression. Through analyzing the life narratives of white Christians, I argue that whiteness and white privilege are maintained, managed, and justified by religio-cultural tool kits; that is a repertoire of ideas, narratives, and behaviors, that (re)shape the daily lived experiences of white Christians. The following dissertation contributes to the development of critical whiteness studies which question or subvert the normative paradigm of whiteness in the hope of opening up space within Christianity for more just and life affirming alternatives.

Turning Points

Professionally, I began to realize the need for critical whiteness studies, especially in relation to white Christianity, after my exposure to Tink Tinker, Vincent Harding, Rachel Harding, and Dwight Hopkins both inside and outside of class. However, I was most profoundly impacted by reading the work of James Cone. I remember listening with anticipation to Cone as he delivered a plenary address to the 2001 meeting of the American Academy of Religion. During his address, “Theology’s Greatest Sin,” he leveled a major indictment against white theologians and white theology. According to Cone:

[Racism] is America’s original sin and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, it is its most persistent and intractable evil. Though racism inflicts massive suffering, few [white] American theologians have even bothered to address white

supremacy as a moral evil and as a radical contradiction of our humanity and religious identities.¹

As a white, heterosexual, male, Christian scholar/theologian and activist, I felt implicated by Cone's statement. I realized that I had a responsibility to address "white supremacy." It is not until "my" people, that is, white Christians, start to understand the complexity of the systems of racism and privilege that benefit us that we will be able to address with integrity the problems that we help to (re)create in the current global situation.

Personally, the issue of racism and white privilege were made very real to me in July of 2006. On Monday, July 3, I read an article in the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* about an attack on the former Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Jeff Berry.² According to the reports, Berry was beaten by two young men, his son Tony Berry and Fred Wilson, who wanted to restart the American Knights. According to Cynthia Carr:

A friend of Tony's threw a lawn chair at the ex-Wizard. The ex-Wizard tackled the friend, Fred Wilson, then let him go. Tony then ran from thirty feet away, striking his father in the head again and again. After partygoers restrained him, young Berry left with Wilson.³

1. James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," in *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Marjorie Bowers-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003), 2, [Http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org/pcw/pdf/Cone_TheologyGreatSin.pdf](http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org/pcw/pdf/Cone_TheologyGreatSin.pdf) Based on a plenary address given at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, CO, this work is also published as "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 55, Numbers 3-4, 2001, 1-14. Cone's address also inspired a collection of works edited by a group of his students. See Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004).

2. Amanda Iacone, "Police: Former KKK Leader Critically Injured," *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, 3 July 2006, A2.

3. Cynthia Carr, *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, A Haunted Town, and the Hidden History of White America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 463.

The elder Berry was taken to a hospital where he was initially given a fifty-fifty chance of survival. Berry was later released, but he had permanent damage to his sight as a result of his injuries.⁴ After reading the news of the event, I was informed by my brother and father that the Fred Wilson in the story was “Freddie” my paternal first cousin. This revelation shook me to my core and was then compounded by a visit to my mother’s home town in central Indiana. My maternal uncle had recently sold my grandmother’s home to my great uncle and a second cousin. As I drove by for a nostalgic look at the house, I noticed the front door of the home was draped in the Confederate Battle Flag, a symbol often used by whites to symbolize their investment in white superiority. Both of these family-connected incidents caused me to revisit the legacy of racism in my own extended family.

Dissertation Rationale: To See Things More Clearly

Inspired by Cone’s charge as well as the legacy of racism in my family, the purpose of this dissertation is to join a substantial and sustained discussion within the academy, the clergy, and white Christian communities regarding the religio-cultural “tool kits,” a repertoire of “ideas, habits, skills, and styles,” which operate in the lives of white Christians.⁵ These tool kits provide individuals with cultural and religious resources for

4. Ibid., 464.

5. Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273. I became aware of Swidler’s idea of cultural tool kits in Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76. Swidler builds her argument using an understanding of “repertoire” from Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries Into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). For the use of *repertoires* in critical whiteness studies see, Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 16. In race critical theory see, Sut Jhally, prod., *Edward Said: On Orientalism* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1998).

explaining their lives and for solving their problems.⁶ In other words, people pick up some cultural and religious tools and put aside others depending on the situation or problem they are trying to address.⁷ In order to join such a conversation, my dissertation will examine the life narratives of a group of white Christians from the greater Fort Wayne, Indiana area in an attempt to identify and expose those religio-cultural tools which may reify racism and white privilege.⁸ It must also be acknowledged that the beliefs and behaviors found among my research participants can only be applied to my research participants. In other words, while the beliefs and behaviors found among the whites in my study may also apply to many other white Christians, the scope of my study was too limited to make broad claims. It is my hope that by naming the religio-cultural tools that reinforce racism and white privilege we can change them. However, the beginning of this process requires exposing and naming what to this point, with few exceptions, has been largely unremarked and unnamed.⁹

One group of scholars has made inroads to better understanding the relationship between the racialization of society and religion. The work of many of these scholars was

6. Swidler, "Culture in Action," 273.

7. Swidler discusses her idea of cultural tool kits or repertoire at great length in her book, *Talk of Love: How Culture Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), especially Chapter Two.

8. Walter Wink has demonstrated the process of naming, unmasking, and engaging systems of oppression in a trilogy which is summed up in his book, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). The books in the trilogy are: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

9. One such exception is, Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961). Lenski's study examines the impact of religious socialization on an individual's worldview and politics.

inspired by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's 2000 book, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. Emerson and Smith concluded in their book that:

Religion, in the context of a racialized society, accentuates group boundaries, divisions, categorizations, and the biases that follow. Religion is of course only one mechanism that contributes to racial division, but an important mechanism. It both reinforces other aspects of racial identity and meaning, and is itself a product of racially separate identities and meanings.¹⁰

Emerson and Smith declare that their book is, "a story of how well-intentioned people, their values, and their institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose."¹¹ I want to further the arguments made by Emerson and Smith by identifying the cultural and religious tools found among an ecumenical group of self-identified white Christians.

It is also my intention that this dissertation stand alongside and, hopefully, expand on the work of those scholars and thinkers who have preceded me with their work in critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, gender studies, queer studies, colonial and so-called post-colonial studies, and cultural criticism. I hope to make clear that I stand in direct opposition to those who assert that racism is no longer an issue and the days of identity politics have passed.

Dissertation Argument Overview

This dissertation argues that whiteness and the oppressive structures it creates are maintained, managed, and justified by the religio-cultural tools of white Christians. This dissertation studies the relationship among the repertoires of white Christians, racism, and white privilege by analyzing the life narratives of self-identified white Christians. I have divided this work into two parts. Part one, comprising Chapters One and Two, outlines

10. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 158.

11. *Ibid.*, 1.

the frameworks, theories, and methods I use to analyze the life narratives of the white Christians that I interviewed. In Chapter One I focus on how my research builds on and contributes to the conversations started by Emerson and Smith. Chapter One outlines the significant conclusions made by these scholars, names the criticisms leveled against them, and states the thesis and assumptions of my work. In Chapter Two I outline frameworks for understanding how cultural and religious tool kits influence interpersonal narratives. Here I'm concerned with the role of cultural and religious repertoires, especially narratives, in the construction of identity and religious beliefs as well as the use of narrative as a method of inquiry and analysis. In the first part of Chapter Two, I argue that dominant cultural and religious repertoires influence personal beliefs that in turn (re)construct cultural and religious repertoires. In the latter part of the chapter, I define narrative inquiry and argue for the legitimacy of its use as a methodology for collecting my research data. Against this background of arguments of narrative identity and cultural tools, Chapters Three and Four, part two, examines the life narratives of twenty research participants and names the religio-cultural tools articulated by these and many other white Christians. Chapter Three names the cultural and religious tools shared among the interviewees which are produced in relationship with racialized consciousness and white privilege. Chapter Four identifies the religio-cultural tools of whiteness that create, maintain, manage, and justify whiteness and its oppressive structures.

CHAPTER 1
SHADES OF AWARENESS

The Legacy of *Divided By Faith*

In 2000 Michael Emerson and Christian Smith published, *Divided By Faith*, which quickly became a seminal work for academics and practitioners interested in the relationship between race and religion, specifically Christianity, in the United States. Emerson and Smith's work has influenced interdisciplinary scholars in sociology, theology, political theory, church history, and race critical theory.¹ *Divided By Faith* became so influential because of the large size of the investigation, based on national survey data of evangelical Protestants in the U.S., and the conclusions reached by Emerson and Smith. Let us now consider four of those conclusions:

First, the authors argued that the United States must be understood as a “racialized society;” that is:

*a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships. A racialized society can also be said to be a society that allocated differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines. [italics in original]*²

1. See for example, Nancy Wadsworth, “Bridging Racial Change: Political Orientations in the United States Evangelical Multiracial Church Movement,” *Politics and Religion* 3, no. 3 (2010): 439–68; Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem’: Extending Emerson and Smith’s *Divided by Faith*,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 3 (2008): 341–59; Victor J. Hinojosa and Jerry Z. Park, “Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 2 (2004): 229–38; and, Antony W. Alumkal, “American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis,” *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (2004): 195–213.

2. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical*

Defining the U.S. as a racialized society is significant because that designation accounts for changes in the racial attitudes of individuals over long periods of history while also accounting for the central role race plays in social, political, and economic systems. The idea of a racialized society establishes a way to explain the ongoing importance of race to those white Americans who believe that racism is the result of individual-level prejudice. A new framework is necessary within white cultural settings because, as Emerson and Smith found, many white evangelicals do not believe a person's race bears any significance on his or her social, political, or economic status. White evangelicals come to this understanding about race through cultural and religious tools, which typically reduce racism to acts of "individual-level discrimination"³ and tend to blame racial inequalities on so-called minorities' lack of motivation and vision.⁴ Emerson and Smith's framework provides an explanation for the importance of race in shaping society while also shifting away from the often charged and complex term *racism*. The framework of a racialized society allows conversations to be recast in terms of *white privilege* which is more likely to bring about positive attitudes among whites toward non-whites and the motivation to work for social change.⁵

Religion and the Problem of Race in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

3. Ibid., 88.

4. Ibid., 98.

5. Adam Powell, Nyla Branscombe, and Michael Schmitt found that when conversations about racial inequality are framed in terms of white privilege rather than black disadvantage whites were more likely to develop an understanding of how racial hierarchies function to their benefit. As a result, whites experienced collective guilt, which in turn may motivate them to personally "defend their egalitarian values by adopting less prejudicial attitudes and creating a more equitable social system" [519]. See, Adam A. Powell, Nancy R. Branscombe, and Michael T. Schmitt, "Inequality as Ingroup Privilege or Outgroup Disadvantage: The Impact of Group Focus on Collective Guilt and Interracial Attitudes," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31 (2005): 508–21.

Second, Emerson and Smith established that, historically, evangelical Christianity has played a large role in justifying the racialization of U.S. society from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.⁶ The authors concluded that even when religion has been “conducive to freeing groups from the direct control of other groups,” it has not been able to correct, “the fundamental divisions that exist in our current racialized society.”⁷ In other words, white evangelical Christianity has been utilized as a mechanism for justifying racial attitudes and establishing whiteness but has done very little to bring about actual racial equality. Emerson and Smith’s recounting of the historical relationship of evangelical Christianity and racism in the United States demonstrates what Charles Tilly has called, “durable inequality.” Tilly argues, “Significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Muslim/Jew rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances.”⁸ For Tilly durable inequalities are created by collective actors and reinforced through the adaptive behavior of individuals.⁹

6. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 21–50.

7. *Ibid.*, 48.

8. Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

9. Tilly argues the causes of inequality are the result of four causal mechanisms which create general categories: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. *Exploitation* is the “unequal distribution of rewards proportionate to value added among participants in the same enterprise” [117]. In other words, organizations take control of resources and then take advantage of efforts of individuals/groups whom they exclude from the profits. *Opportunity hoarding* “operates when members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a resource that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network’s modus operandi” [154]. Opportunity hoarding is used to create inequality when a small minority use an opportunity to exploit others. *Emulation* is “the copying or transplanting of established organizational models to new settings” [10]. Emulation is used to create inequality by transposing social hierarchies to new categories. *Adaptation* is “the elaboration of everyday rituals and practices that cope with and so reproduce inequality in

Tilly is concerned with the categorical inequalities that have been institutionalized and endure for generations. These inequalities persist because of social organization and are reinforced by institutions that “control access to value-producing resources.”¹⁰ Value-producing resources include: laws/policies, labor, property, capital, media, coercive means and most importantly for this project religious doctrines and rituals. Groups in power, or with power, utilize categorical inequalities sustained by value-producing resources to maintain boundaries to exclude those they deem undesirable. As Emerson and Smith have demonstrated, the durable inequalities found in the categories created by racism have been systematically maintained over decades through white evangelical Christianity. For example, Emerson and Smith discuss the use of scriptures by clergy in the early eighteenth century to reaffirm slavery as a valid institution as well as the categories of slave/master.¹¹ Contemporary terms discussed by Emerson and Smith include “individual prejudice” and “sin” which function to individualize racism allowing evangelicals to dismiss the racial inequalities sustained by socio-political structures.¹² Systemically and institutionally, the white Christian tool kits, collection of religious and cultural resources used to keep whiteness in place have included economics, the law, and religion.¹³

human interaction” [10]. Adaptation is used to create inequality when categories from society are used as a form of motivation in a group of workers. See, Tilly, *Durable Inequality*.

10. Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, 8.

11. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 24–5.

12. *Ibid.*, 88.

13. For a detailed treatment of the relationship between race and economics see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994). Examples of race and the legal system can be found in Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Glenn T. Morris, “Vine Deloria, Jr., and the Development of a Decolonizing Critique of Indigenous Peoples and International

Third, Emerson and Smith concluded that, “the organization of American religion powerfully drives religious groups toward internal similarities.”¹⁴ This argument reveals the role played by social networks, religious beliefs, and competition among Christian congregations in the homogenization of Christian groups and the members of those groups.¹⁵ The reason this argument is important, as I will argue in detail in Chapter Two, is that an individual’s identity is greatly influenced by the groups with which she or he finds solidarity. Individuals learn how to function within the society through rules, both spoken and unspoken, that are passed on through social relationships such as family, school, and church. If white Christians find shared values and community in white congregations, then it is necessary to understand the role of churches in facilitating social boundaries. Matt Wray has charged those who do whiteness studies to focus their attention, “...on the processes and agents that generate symbolic boundaries and grant them social power.”¹⁶ Churches operate on two different social levels that compete with one another, and this competition in turn helps to foster white Christian isolation through social boundaries. According to Emerson and Smith:

Relations,” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity & Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 97–154; and Ward Churchill and Glenn T. Morris, “Key Indian Laws and Cases,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: Southend Press, 1992), 13–21. The use of religion to create boundaries and categories of durable inequality will be discussed throughout this dissertation, but two examples of significant works are, George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), and David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford Press, 1992).

14. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 136.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 139.

Part of the irony of religion's role is that in strengthening micro bonds between individuals, religion contributes to within-group homogeneity, heightens isolation from different groups, and reduces the opportunity for the formation of macro bonds—bonds between groups—that serve to integrate a society.¹⁷

Groups develop close micro bonds drawing upon the similarities within the group, and at the same time these groups also start to distinguish themselves for the sake of solidarity.¹⁸ For most white congregations the boundaries created from shared values, which foster a sense of belonging, have been greatly influenced by social factors such as race and class.¹⁹ Guided by social rules and prescribed understandings of reality, individuals learn how to identify and categorize persons and objects. The way a person learns how to perceive and classify the world has a direct impact on how he or she goes about daily life.²⁰

Fourth, Emerson and Smith found that white and black evangelicals have clearly defined and vastly different understandings about racism.²¹ White evangelicals draw tools from an individualist racial tool kit that makes them blind to systemic and institutionalized racism. According to Emerson and Smith:

We can see that it is necessary for [white] evangelicals to interpret the problem [of race] at the individual level. To do otherwise would challenge the very basis of their world, both their faith and the American way of life. They accept and support individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism.²²

17. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 155.

18. Wray, *Not Quite White*, 2.

19. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 145 and 17. See also, Wray, *Not Quite White*, 14.

20. Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 1.

21. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 88.

22. *Ibid.*, 89.

Black evangelicals, on the other hand, choose from a completely different religio-cultural tool kit, and understand race as a structural problem.²³

Joining the Conversation: Contributing to the *Divided By Faith* Literature

While Emerson and Smith's *Divided By Faith* has had a profound influence on understandings of evangelical Christianity and the persistence of racialization in U.S. society, it has also received a fair share of criticism. It is necessary for me to address some of these criticisms before introducing how this dissertation contributes to the conversation started by Emerson and Smith.

First, while Emerson and Smith's history of the relationship of anti-black racism and white evangelical Christianity from 1700-1964 is very good, it omits the significant influence of European colonial expansion on the development of the concept of race in relationship to European Christianity. European Christianity was the ideological basis for racist thinking, and even the concept of race itself, prior to the eighteenth century, and it was the Christian ideas of race, explained below, that Enlightenment thinkers built upon. The historical relationship between white Christianity and anti-black sentiment is well established and can be traced as far back as 400 CE when European Christians started to interact with Moors and Muslims.²⁴ In relationship to contemporary understandings of the racialized Other, interactions through the fourteenth century focused primarily on religious practices and orthodox belief.²⁵ However, modern racism comes into being at the point of

23. *Ibid.*, 86.

24. Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 134–6.

25. See, Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 60; David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 24; and, Hopkins, *Being Human*, 137. George Fredrickson has also argued that contemporary racism can be traced back to the treatment of Jews by Christians during the Inquisition. See his book, *Racism: A Short Story* (Princeton:

colonial contact due to a breach in the Euro-Christian worldview which contributed to a theological crisis.

One of the salient markers of fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe is an obsession with how the origins and/or causes of dark skin can be reconciled with the belief that every human is a descendent of the original parents found in the biblical narratives of Creation. This produced a theological crisis for Europeans: if human beings evolved from one set of parents, how can the reality of people with different skin tones be explained? Monogenesis, the idea that one couple was responsible for all humanity, served as a foundation for much of Christian theology. Colin Kidd notes that, “the whole Christian scheme of Fall, transmission of original sin and the redemption of Christ, if it has a valid claim to universality, seems logically to require all humans are descended from the first parents Adam and Eve.”²⁶ If not everyone was a descendent of Adam and Eve, then where did they come from? If monogenesis was not true, then the tenets of salvation must also be questioned. If some were not descendants of the primordial parents, were they “saved,” that is, afforded eternal salvation by God? Rooted in notions of being the chosen people and having been given dominion over creation, the European church-states initiated the creation of racialization based on skin color and purity/goodness. According to Aime Cesaire:

The chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations *Christianity=civilization, paganism=savagery*, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes.” [italics in original]²⁷

Princeton University Press, 2002), especially 15-48.

26. Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.

27. Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pickham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 33.

As the “Age of Discovery” continued, travel writings reinforced the European self-understanding that they were the children of God and the children of light; non-Europeans were then by definition “out-side the light.”²⁸

A second criticism of *Divided By Faith* is Emerson and Smith’s binary framing of race in terms of black and white.²⁹ Antony Alumkal argues that there are two problems with this framework. First, Alumkal argues that non-white groups are racialized in different ways. That is, not all groups have experienced racism, discrimination, and oppression in exactly the same way.³⁰ For example, if a person is born to a white mother, her or his chances of survival to birth are three and a half times higher than someone whose mother is black, and seventy-five percent higher than someone whose mother is Puerto Rican.³¹ A white person’s overall chances of living to the age of one is almost two and a half times higher than blacks, one and a half times higher than American

28. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 1997), 5.

29. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 11.

30. Alumkal, “American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era,” 210. For an understanding of the different ways racialized groups have been treated throughout U.S. history see: Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993); Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998); Churchill and Morris, “Key Indian Laws and Cases”; Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*; and, Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

31. Marian F. MacDorman, et al., *Trends in Preterm-Related Infant Mortality by Race and Ethnicity: United States, 1999–2004* (Hyattsville: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007), [Http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/infantmort99-04/infantmort99-04.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/infantmort99-04/infantmort99-04.htm) (accessed 04 April 2009).

Indians/Alaskan Natives, and almost one and a half times higher than Puerto Ricans.³² Second, Alumkal argues that Emerson and Smith’s perspective “misses the way in which processes of racialization are interrelated. That is, the racialization of each individual racial group is influenced by the racialization of other racial groups.”³³ Alumkal demonstrates this point in his analysis of evangelical Asian Americans and campus ministries. Asian American students face hostility from white and other racial minority students who see Asian Americans as “‘invading’ campuses and bringing unwelcome competition for grades.”³⁴ One reason Asian American students are treated in this way is that Asian Americans have been racialized by the dominant white culture as a “‘model minority,’ hard working and successful.”³⁵ Stereotyping Asian Americans in this way creates tensions between Asian Americans and other racial minorities such as blacks and Latino/as, who have often been stereotyped as “‘lazy.’”

A third criticism of Emerson and Smith’s work is that it undervalues the importance of individualistic ideals in framing whiteness and white culture.³⁶ Emerson

32. Ibid.

33. Alumkal, “American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era,” 210.

34. Ibid., 207.

35. Alumkal is borrowing the phrase “model minority” from Ronald Takaki. According to Takaki, “Asian-American ‘success’ has emerged as the new stereotype for this ethnic minority. While this image has led many teachers and employers to view Asians as intelligent and hardworking and has opened some opportunities, it has also been harmful. Asian Americans find their diversity as individuals denied: many feel forced to conform to the ‘model minority’ mold and want more freedom to be their individual selves” [476]. See, Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 474–84.

36. Tranby and Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem,’” 341. Tranby and Hartmann are also concerned that anti-black stereotypes “may be subtler, more pervasive, and more functionally necessary than Emerson and Smith assume” [341]. While I will argue in Chapter Three that racists’ stereotypes are pervasive and a subtle part of the white cultural tool kit, I believe it is difficult to make that assessment about Emerson and Smith’s study without looking through their interview

and Smith do acknowledge the importance of the “freewill-individualist tradition,” the idea individuals are responsible for their actions, among white evangelicals and conservative Protestants. The authors argue that this is one of the biggest obstacles to overcoming racial inequality.³⁷ However, they move too quickly in their analysis of the relationship between individualism and whiteness, almost naturalizing individualism rather than seeing individualism as something that comes from whiteness.³⁸ Whites, by and large, understand themselves to be individuals rather than members of any racial group. The history of white cultural dominance coupled with the Enlightenment ideals of liberal individualism has created a worldview in which it is easy for contemporary whites, regardless of their religious identity or lack thereof, to believe that individuals exist outside social structures and are therefore individually responsible for their choices and decisions.³⁹ Such an understanding helps whites explain away racism and inequality in terms of individualistic traits and merit; that is, racist acts are seen to be committed by ignorant whites, and inequality exists because individuals from racial minorities do not try hard enough. Emerson and Smith have correctly identified the evangelical and conservative Protestant contributions to this phenomenon, but as Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann have argued, individualist ideals help maintain white culture and identity.⁴⁰

transcripts.

37. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 76–77 and 109.

38. Emerson and Smith remark on the tendency of whites in general to see the problem of racial inequality in individualistic ways rather than as something structural, but move quickly to discuss attitudes among evangelicals. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 109.

39. For a detailed account of whiteness and liberal individualism see Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*, Revised and Updated (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 27-8.

40. Tranby and Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem’,” 341.

In order to avoid the criticisms raised about Emerson and Smith's study I have made several adjustments to my own work. First, I have argued that the relationship of contemporary racism and Christianity can be traced back to European colonial expansion and the breach in worldview created when whites encountered the indigenous people of Africa and the Americas. This argument is important because it demonstrates the role of white Christianity in the origins of racialized societies. While Emerson and Smith have argued that evangelical Christianity has helped to preserve the racialization of U.S. society, I argue that white Christianity contributes to the racialization of U.S. society.

Second, in an attempt to move beyond Emerson and Smith's binary understanding of race in America, I asked interviewees open-ended and nondescript questions with regard to race and racism. I avoided asking questions about specific racialized minorities. For example, interviewees were asked to talk about the first time they encountered a person who was not white. Interviewees were also asked how race and racism were addressed by their families during the interviewees' childhood. Asking open-ended questions about race and racism yielded detailed personal accounts about interviewees' interactions with people who are black, Latino/a, Chinese, Burmese, Pakistani, and Vietnamese. Further, while my research confirmed Emerson and Smith's results that the black-white racial divide was most prominent among interviewees,⁴¹ my research also showed a growing consciousness among whites in greater Fort Wayne, Indiana about the immigrant populations of Latinos/Latinas, primarily from Mexico, and Burmese refugees. By asking questions that move beyond the black/white binary I was able to expand the how racialization operates in the lives of white Christians.

Third, I build on Emerson and Smith's arguments that white evangelical Christians understand race from an individualist perspective. I do so by utilizing arguments from whiteness studies that demonstrate the individualist perspective of whites are not socially

41. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 11.

or politically neutral, but serve as a basis for whiteness.⁴² I demonstrate throughout this dissertation that most whites, regardless of their Christian beliefs, generally understand themselves to be autonomous individuals rather than members of a racial group. Said differently, being white is not something that most whites are forced to think about in their day-to-day existence.⁴³ The ability of whites to compartmentalize race results in a spectrum of awareness among whites about white privilege and systematized racism.

Shades of Awareness and the Countervailing Influences of Religion on Racialization

My work confirms and builds on the work of Emerson and Smith by demonstrating how white Christians in general, not just evangelicals, contribute to the ongoing racialization of society through their cultural and religious tools. I came to this conclusion by interviewing a group of twenty white Christians from greater Fort Wayne, Indiana. Like Emerson and Smith, I discovered a spectrum of awareness, various degrees of understanding, among whites about racism.⁴⁴ In addition, I found a spectrum of awareness among whites about racism and white privilege that included on one end whites who were not only aware of the problems of racism and white privilege, but were actively working to make changes, and on the other end whites who believed racism was not a problem and some who were overtly racists. The middle of the spectrum included a group of whites who were somewhat empathetic to the problems of racism and white privilege, but who were unsure about what they could do to change things or who did not feel compelled to work for change.

42. Tranby and Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem’,” 346.

43. Emerson and Smith briefly address the problem of race being “compartmentalized” in the minds of whites; however, they do not address the significance of this process. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 71.

44. Emerson and Smith attribute this spectrum awareness to the degree of isolation whites have from black relationships. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 80–6.

To provide a working understanding of this spectrum, consider the following examples from my interviews: Judy Ellsworth and Sara Butterfield⁴⁵ are on that end of the spectrum actively engaged in working for racial equality. Judy Ellsworth, a professor and member of a United Church of Christ, stated she is very concerned about social oppression. When I asked her about what it meant to be a Christian she responded, “Christ as a model of what God would have us be like in this world.” Ellsworth explained that being Christ-like meant having, “a sense of social commitment to the community and the world.” She then discussed the many ways she and her recently deceased husband worked for racial, gender, and queer equality. Similarly, when Sara Butterfield, a member of a Unitarian Universalist congregation, was asked about what it means to be Christian she stated, “An understanding that there is a greater power out there that cares about every human being.” Butterfield went on to discuss how she has worked to confront racism in her own life and the way her church has been active in the community to work for change.

Examples from the middle of the spectrum, those white Christians who were somewhat aware of racism and white privilege but were unsure or did not feel a need to make change, included Parker Wallis and Semus Miller. As Parker Wallis and I sat in a coffee shop and talked, he reflected on racism and white privilege at work around him and in his life. According to Wallis, “We live in a society that benefits whites, there is no doubt. But I think we over analyze this stuff.” Wallis believed that racism and white privilege were problems and needed to be addressed when witnessed; however, he also believed that too much has been made of race relations. Semus Miller, a city employee, discussed the times he was witness to overt acts of racial discrimination. Miller believes that, “You should treat people the way you want to be treated. I don’t care if you’re

45. The names of research subjects have been changed. For subject profiles see Appendix B.

Hispanic, black, or from Mars.” Miller believed that people made too much of political issues including race.

On the other end of the awareness spectrum were the interviewees who believed that society makes too much of racism and white privilege. Two examples of this group are Ralph Meyers and Cadie Collins. I met with Ralph Meyers, a member of the Church of the Brethren, in his home, over coffee. Meyers believes that the role of the church is to keep society in check. However, he was resentful about racism and white privilege. Meyers had this to say about white privilege: “[It means] you are better off being white than any other color in this country up until a decade ago.” He continued, “The opposite is overstated too, blacks complain now about how they were treated in slavery times. Well gosh come on let’s get real. Let’s look at now. What happened back then is back then.” Cadie Collins’ remarks, a member of the Church of God (Anderson) and a “homemaker,” are another example. Collins believed that the role of the church was to bring Christ into people’s lives. Much of Collins’ life had been spent on mission trips as a part of the Salvation Army. Collins had this to say about white privilege: “I almost think it’s the other way around. I almost think that some of my brothers of color have been benefiting by their color.” She later continued, “I grew up seeing and hearing the love of Christ, and not seeing, ‘I got this appointment because I was black!’ or ‘Well you got that appointment because you were white,’ you know.” Collins believed that there was not enough talk about the love of God and too much talk about the problems that divided society.

In addition to finding a spectrum of awareness about racism and white privilege, my research also confirmed Emerson and Smith’s understanding of religion as a countervailing influence on the racialization of U.S. society; that is, religion as a conservative force, by nature, reinforces the status quo.⁴⁶ According to Emerson and

46. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 154.

Smith, “These countervailing influences attenuate the impact of religion’s positive actions, and ironically help generate and perpetuate the very conditions that these positive actions seek to end.”⁴⁷ What I discovered was that while there were interviewees who had a sense of their privilege and were working for change, the overwhelming majority of interviewees, knowingly and unknowingly, used at least one kind of cultural or religious narrative from their tool kits to reinforce racialization. In other words, these negative narratives are counter productive to any positive contributions made by white Christians in the fight against racism. I will discuss in Chapter Three the evidence for both negative and positive white cultural tools and white religious tools. I will further demonstrate that when these tools are combined the result is religio-cultural tools that create countervailing influences on racialization.

Assumptions and Definitions

Before moving further into my research it is necessary to clearly identify my assumptions and the definitions that will be utilized throughout the remainder of this dissertation. One primary assumption undergirds this dissertation: humans are socio-cultural beings who produce or construct their collective social realities.⁴⁸ A person learns the rules of society and the language of culture through the processes of socialization. “Appropriate” behaviors, or the norms of society, are determined through social relationships (family and friends), social groups (churches and clubs), and the societies

47. Ibid.

48. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 7. The idea of the social production of reality came to prominence with Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966). Their work continues to be fundamental in today’s cultural criticism, sociology, and theological anthropology, as well as, many of the social sciences. The origins of the social construction of whiteness as a part of critical white studies begins with Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993).

(countries and towns) to which a person belongs. More importantly, the way a person learns the rules, norms, and behaviors of society is accomplished by personally adopting the cultural and communal repertoires as her or his own.⁴⁹ As will be discussed in Chapter Two, cultural tool kits provide tools that help individuals construct a framework of meaning for deciphering information and making decisions.

How terms are understood and used has a profound impact on any work; therefore it will prove helpful to have a general overview of how I will use several terms. *Race*, *racism*, *white privilege*, and *whiteness* are all interconnected terms, but they still have distinct meanings. The modern concept of *race* originated within the efforts of western science to classify humans founded on biological characteristics.⁵⁰ The scientists who created these systems of classification, as discussed above, were greatly influenced by the theological crisis created by European expansion. Stuart Hall has described race as a “floating signifier;” that is, race is a socially constructed classification of difference with socio-historical significance structured in language and ascribed privilege within a given context.⁵¹ Race is a signifier that has meaning in a specific culture, and that meaning is rooted in a set of demarcations of which biological difference is crucial.⁵² For the purpose

49. Thandeka makes this argument in her book *Learning to Be White*. While the focus of her work is the connection between whiteness and shame it introduces the reader to the premise that “no one is born white.” See Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

50. See Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, especially Chapter 3, “Racialized Discourse.”

51. Sut Jhally, prod., *Race, the Floating Signifier Featuring Stuart Hall* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1996); and Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 131.

52. To argue that race is given meaning through social construction does not require the denial of biological differences. Biological differences do exist, and one can move too quickly to a removal of biology in an anti-essentialist argument. For those who have been denied access to the dominant norm or normative group it may be necessary to use a “strategic essentialism,” i.e., exercise the right to define one’s self or community in

of this dissertation it is important to note that not all cultures give race the same social weight or significance. As I argue above, this was true in Europe prior to the fifteenth century. Race only gained significance in European and Amero-european society as a result of colonial expansion. It should also be noted that racial classifications, especially the classification of “white,” change over time. For example, in pre-colonial Europe the Irish were not seen as white. It was only after several decades of colonial expansion that the Irish, the Italians and other “fair skinned” European groups became white and gained access to the rights and privileges that come with being white in the contemporary United States.⁵³

Racism⁵⁴ is a framework of meaning, constructed around race and constituted by

essentialist terms, to forge the solidarity to resist. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” allows for the retrieval of a “rebel consciousness.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 214.

53. For detailed accounts about how the Irish and the Italians “became white,” see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and, David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White; the Strange Journey From Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

54. At the urging of several critical readers and editors, I have decided not to use the terms “white supremacy” or “white superiority” due to the white hate and extremist group images it conjures for many white readers. Within the fields of race critical theory and critical whiteness studies there has been movement toward using the term white supremacy. bell hooks has made a cogent argument for a shift in language from racism and white superiority to white supremacy. For hooks, white supremacy articulates a system in which whites and people of color participate through assimilation of the white norm. See, “Overcoming White Supremacy: A Comment,” in bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1995), 184–95. Frances Kendall makes a similar argument in, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series (New York: Routledge, 2006), xiii-iv. Within the fields of religious and theological studies the use of white supremacy can be found in, among others: Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004); Hopkins, *Being Human*; and Jennifer Harvey, *Whiteness*

claims that one racial group is superior to another. Racism carries the power to exclude or include based on socially defined differences assigned to biology.⁵⁵ As will be argued in Chapter Three, many white people believe that racism ended after the Civil Rights Movement because overt bigotry and hatred are no longer deemed publicly acceptable; indeed, in the post-Civil Rights era it has become politically correct to be “color-blind.”⁵⁶ Color-blindness, in this context, entails not being overtly discriminatory or using racist speech. Racism in the mind of many whites equates to individual prejudice and/or individual acts of discrimination.⁵⁷ Racism is then relegated to a few ignorant whites, and ignores institutions and systems of power which are based in, or informed by, white privilege. In addition, many whites believe that race problems in the United States are due to minority groups being “stuck in the past” and/or because individuals within these

and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice Through Reparations and Sovereignty (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

55. Emerson and Smith define racism as “collective misuse of power that harms another racial group.” See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 120.

56. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva described the “ideology of color-blind racism” as having four primary characteristics: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism uses the ideas of political and economic liberalism (e.g. individual choice and equal opportunity) to guard against any substantial change in politics or the work-place. Naturalization holds that people self-segregate in order to be with those of similar appearance and values. Cultural racism functions by assigning some deficiency to a particular racial group (e.g. Blacks do not work as hard as Mexicans because they do not come from a working culture.). Maybe it’s passé now but Mexicans used to be considered lazy. The minimization of racism entails the dismissal of racist speech and actions as perpetrated only by deviant individuals. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Oxford: Rowmann & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 28–9. See also Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001), especially Chapter 5.

57. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 87.

groups do not take enough personal responsibility for improving their lot in life.⁵⁸ From this perspective, even the few ignorant whites are not the problem; rather, it is individuals in communities of color who make poor choices and then resort to using the “race card” as the excuse for their inability to succeed. In this dissertation racism refers to both group and individual behaviors. Collectively, racism also exists or is revealed through the privileges afforded to whites by political, legal, and social systems based solely on their skin color and physical features. For the individual, as I will argue in Chapter Two, the perpetuation of racism develops as individuals acquire a set of beliefs from society, groups, friends, and family. For several of the whites I interviewed, racism was still very much a part of their memory. Twenty percent of those interviewed reported that on occasion they could still “hear” the voice of their father, or another male relative, in their head, uttering racial slurs when in tenuous or conflict situations with a person of color. Three of the four participants who shared about hearing male voices from their past also showed a higher degree of awareness about racialization.

White privileges are advantages afforded to whites, or those assumed to be white, and denied to other racial groups simply because of the color of their skin.⁵⁹ These advantages or “unearned entitlements” come at the price of disadvantages for those

58. Bonilla-Silva documents this phenomenon based on extensive data collection and analysis in his book, *White Supremacy and Racism*. See also, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 74ff.

59. In critical white studies the idea of white privilege was popularized by the work of Peggy McIntosh. See the widely reprinted, Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 291–9. See also Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, Second ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006); and Stephanie M. Wildman and Adriene D. Davis, “Making Systems of Privilege Visible,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 314–9.

outside the privileged group.⁶⁰ Individuals receive these unearned advantages because they are perceived by others as belonging to privileged groups or social categories.⁶¹ These advantages or entitlements are conferred upon individuals at birth based on their race, sex, and lack of so-called birth defects. In the United States, unearned advantages are granted to white, heterosexual, nondisabled men. Statistically proving the existence of white privilege is very easy. As noted earlier, being born white or to a white mother is the foundation of a better chance at life from conception. In addition, a white person has better access to education, health insurance, and employment throughout young adulthood, and an overall greater chance of not living in poverty.⁶² However, given my

60. McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," 296; and Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege, Color, and Crime: A Personal Account," in *Images of Color, Images of Crime*, ed. Coramae Richey Mann and Majorie S. Zatz (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Co., 1998), 212.

61. Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference*, 34.

62. MacDorman, et al., *Trends in Preterm-Related Infant Mortality by Race and Ethnicity*; Gary Orfield, Daniel Lobsen, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, Advocates for Children of New York and The Civil Society Institute (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2004), [Http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410936_LosingOurFuture.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410936_LosingOurFuture.pdf) (accessed 04 April 2009); National Center for Health Statistics, *Uninsured Americans: Newly Released Health Insurance Statistics* (Hyattsville: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007), [Http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Uninsured/](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Uninsured/) (accessed 04 April 2009); Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Education Pays* (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, 2008), [Http://www.bls.gov/emp/emptab7.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/emptab7.htm) (accessed 04 April 2009); National Committee on Pay Equity, *Pay Equity Information* (Washington: National Committee on Pay Equity, 2008), [Http://www.pay-equity.org/info-Q&A.html](http://www.pay-equity.org/info-Q&A.html) (accessed 04 April 2009); U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey: 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, PINC-05 (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), [Http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032007/perinc/new05_000.htm](http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032007/perinc/new05_000.htm) (accessed 04 April 2009). Asian/Pacific Islanders when compared with whites are an exception to some of these trends. Asian/Pacific Islander students graduate at a rate 2% higher than whites. Asian men and women make wages equal to 116% of their white male and female counter-parts. However, Asian women still make 7% less than white men and 24% less

emphasis on the everyday practices of whites it is necessary to name some of the less visible privileges. Consider the following examples:

- Whites can choose to be aware of or to ignore their racial heritage.⁶³
- Whites can choose to have little contact with people of color.⁶⁴
- It is unlikely a white person will be stopped in an airport just for looking “Muslim.”
- Groups of white youth are allowed to gather in public without being harassed by the police.
- When the media and educators talk about U.S. history and ‘civilization’ white people are always credited with making it happen.⁶⁵
- A white person “can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see [white people] widely and positively represented.”⁶⁶
- A white person does not wonder if he/she is being stopped by the police because of his or her race.
- Whites can go to the mall or a restaurant without questioning the kind of service they may receive.

White privilege exists as measurable forms of social status granted by government regulations and laws. It also exists as a set of social arrangements or veiled assurances for whites as they go through their daily lives.

Whiteness, like other racial labels, is difficult to define because the definition is contingent on the syntax or social context, and upon who is making the determination of

than Asian men.

63. Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference*, 26.

64. Martha R. Mahoney, “Racial Construction and Women as Differentiated Actors,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 308.

65. McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” 293.

66. *Ibid.*

its meaning.⁶⁷ For the purposes of my dissertation, whiteness is both a “category of analysis and a mode of lived experience.”⁶⁸ As a category of analysis whiteness is a cultural tool kit, a repertoire, a social framework, and system of boundaries that allows racism and white privilege to be maintained in U.S. society through shifting systems, practices, and histories that culminate in privileges, resources, and power for whites. As a model of lived experience, narratives of whiteness reinforce conscious and unconscious attitudes of white superiority, arrogance, and privilege. As a dominant cultural narrative and a system of boundaries, whiteness comes to represent interlocking hierarchical structures found in and maintained by the socio-cultural institutions of whites.

Some Conclusions

Currently, the racialization of the United States remains hidden to most whites because they believe that everyone achieved equality after the Civil Rights movement. Although the binary structures of the past are still alive and well, the structures have become more fluid, constantly redefining the boundaries of whiteness. Whiteness is visible through skin privilege, which is often granted to those who appear to have white or light skin. Whiteness is invisible when whites do not have to think about their race. Frances Kendall writes, “Many of us who are white have little sense of what that means for our lives, and we are not particularly interested in finding out. It doesn’t seem relevant.... Because we are in the dominant power group racially, we are able to define how we are

67. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene Nexica, and Matt Wray discuss the difficulties of defining whiteness within the interdisciplinary field of critical whiteness studies. See the introduction to their edited book, *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-24. See also Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within*, especially 15–31.

68. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray, eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 9.

seen by other white people.”⁶⁹

Whiteness is both individual and social. Most whites see themselves as individuals and not members of a racial group. Since not all whites receive the same amount of privilege, there is no clear identification with others who belong to the white racial group. Many whites do not believe that they are privileged due to their life’s circumstances, and therefore do not acknowledge whiteness as something which gives them status.

Whiteness is law. Most of the laws and legal structures in the U.S. were created by whites for whites.⁷⁰ Interactions between whites and non-whites have been regulated and legislated since Europeans came into contact with indigenous people during European colonial expansion. It is the U.S. legal system since the writing of the Constitution that has deemed the worth of individuals and groups, be they American Indians, slaves, women, or immigrants. The legal system has helped maintain white dominance to such a degree that today non-whites are disproportionately imprisoned and disenfranchised by the U.S. legal system.⁷¹

Whiteness is sex and gender. Laurel Schneider argues that, “race affects one’s experience and even the embodiment of one’s gender, and gender affects one’s experience and even the embodiment of race.”⁷² White men have used race and gender in interchangeable ways to gain privilege and to disenfranchise women and non-whites. This

69. Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41.

70. For a detailed account of this phenomenon see, Haney Lopez, *White By Law*.

71. The law is also male. See Lucinda Joy Peach, “Is Violence Male? Law, Gender, and Violence,” in *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War and Resistance*, ed. Marguerite R. Waller and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2001), 57–74.

72. Laurel C. Schneider, “What Race is Your Gender?” in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen and Eric Klinenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 142.

can be demonstrated by the feminization of people of color. Schneider writes, “the white race is thus gendered male by virtue of its dominance, and the non-white races are gendered female, indicating their need for supervision.”⁷³

Whiteness is class. Elizabeth Bounds observes that to be white is to be at least middle-class.⁷⁴ Race has been made into a class and class has been racialized. An example of how class and race have been aligned can be found in Joe Feagin and Eileen O’Brien’s study of elite, white men. One study participant stated, “So the blacks we met there were really ‘white blacks.’ When I moved to another state, though, the experiences were totally different, because these were more, should we say, ‘urban blacks.’”⁷⁵ The blacks that this person labeled as “white blacks” were similar to his own socio-economic status as a white, middle-upper-class male. Due to their proximity in status, the blacks were more white than “urban blacks” whom he assumed were poor.

Whiteness is Christian. As I argued earlier in this chapter, Christianity and whiteness have had a very strong relationship since the fourteenth century. Emerson and Smith’s work also demonstrates the link between the maintenance of contemporary whiteness and evangelical Christianity. The remainder of this dissertation builds on the work of Emerson and Smith, and will demonstrate the relationship of whiteness to Christianity in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

White privilege is represented by the characteristics and boundaries of whiteness which have been invented and fostered over time in the cultural and religious tool kits of

73. Ibid., 154.

74. Elizabeth M. Bounds, “Gaps and Flashpoints: Untangling Race and Class,” in *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 128.

75. Joe R. Feagin and Eileen O’Brien, *White Men on Race: Power, Privilege, and the Shaping of Cultural Consciousness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 34.

white society. As a system, it is like a lizard which will sacrifice its tail in order to avoid capture and escape becoming a larger animal's next meal. In doing so, the lizard is no less a lizard, and its tail does grow back. White privilege can sacrifice a part of the system and be no less than it was before because it, too, can regenerate its lost pieces. A system such as this can only be dismantled by clearly identifying all of its parts and dealing with each one.

In the next chapter I explore the understanding that religion is at the heart of one's identity and what one believes to be the Truth. Many people learn about and form their identity based on the cultural and religious tool kits provided to them. These tool kits provide them with tools they can use to construct and interpret different experiences, distinguishing one as right and another as wrong. One part of the cultural and religious tool kits can be found in the life narratives. It is life narratives that help give humans identity and life its meaning. In the U.S. there are people who experience racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and/or xenophobia in their daily interactions; there must therefore also be people who perpetuate and perpetrate these interactions.⁷⁶ This study seeks to show that the contextual nature of whiteness fosters various cultural and religious tools which collude in order to perpetuate the racialization of U.S. society.

76. For a study of everyday racism see: Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, Sage Series on Race and Ethnic Relations (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOOL KITS: REPERTOIRES, LIFE NARRATIVES, AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Defining Life Narratives

I will use an interdisciplinary approach to narrative inquiry and narrative analysis in order to investigate the construction of self and structures of society.¹ Through this “discursive approach,”² I intend to demonstrate how the cultural and religious tools of white Christians produce socio-political power and reinforce the racialized status quo. My approach is to ask how white Christians think about, articulate, act on, and produce socio-political difference and understandings of the ‘other.’

For the purposes of this dissertation, *cultural and religious tool kits* are defined as, a selection of “ideas, habits, skills, and styles,” people choose from to “solve different kinds of problems.”³ Cultural and religious tool kits may also be called “repertoires” and

1. The multiple disciplines I am drawing from include: theology, philosophy, religious studies, peace and justice studies, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography, critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies. Critical whiteness studies is an interdisciplinary field which engages and addresses the social construction of whiteness and the attendant moral implications. See, for example, Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series (New York: Routledge, 2006); and, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

2. Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997), 6.

3. Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273.

provide a variety of options “from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action.”⁴ Cultural and religious tool kits contain tools, what Stuart Hall identifies as “accounts,” such as shared cultural stories, personal stories, novels, movies, sermons, and biographies which enable human beings to communicate, or, “represent our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to ‘read,’ decode or interpret their meaning in roughly the same way that we do.”⁵ As will be explained in greater detail below, cultural and religious tool kits contain representational stories, because they allow individuals to give meaning to the events and experiences of life by referencing concepts from the larger culture. These stories are representative because they reinforce what an individual believes to be true. Cultural and religious tool kits and the tools they provide help give meaning to one’s experience and provide a medium for one to express self identity.

In this dissertation I will most often refer to cultural and religious tools which constitute the “common sense” ideas of a society (including churches) and provide “conceptual frameworks for individuals.”⁶ These tools are held in the collective or

4. Ibid., 277.

5. Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997), 5. For Hall, the importance of representations and ‘systems of representation’ is how they construct meaning. Hall’s concept of ‘representation’ includes language, images, music, literature, media, and art. For example, the Christian cross as a visual representation has a multitude of meanings, such as: two pieces of wood, the death of Jesus the Christ, a sign of imperialism, sacrifice, and torture. The meaning of the cross for an individual depends on how it is defined by her or his culture and personal experience. As with Foucault, Hall’s concern with the construction of meaning is power relations and who it is that dictates the ‘common’ understanding of any representation. See Stuart Hall, *Representation*; Sut Jhally, prod., *Stuart Hall: Media, Race & Representation* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1997); and, Sut Jhally, prod., *Race, the Floating Signifier Featuring Stuart Hall* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1996).

6. Ruth Franenberg articulates this idea in terms of “discursive repertoires.” See,

popular imagination of a society and invoke justification for policies and practices that maintain cohesion for the dominant group. Cultural and religious tools can either exist for specific periods of time and/or persist over time informing the behaviors and structures of society. I am concerned primarily with how these cultural and religious tools maintain whiteness, racism, and white privilege. My investigation will involve analyzing cultural and religious tools as manifested in *life narrative*, the various narratives an individual shares about his or her life.⁷ For some readers the term ‘life narrative’ will conjure notions of *the* story of an individual’s entire life. However, our life narratives are not one continuous narrative, but instead are a collection of vignettes woven together in an effort to create a consistent whole. Two types of life narratives will be addressed throughout the remainder of this dissertation: “naturalistic life stories” and “researched life stories.”⁸

Naturalistic life stories are the narratives that a person *tells* as a part of their

Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 265n2. See also, Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 47.

7. Life narratives are also identified by other scholars as: “repertoires,” “discourse about the self,” “personal narratives,” “self stories, life stories, life histories, auto/biographies, personal documents, life narratives, oral histories, and documents of life.” See Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 16; also Nigel Edley, “Analyzing Masculinity: Interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions,” in *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, ed. Simeon Yates, Margaret Wetherell, and Stephanie Taylor (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 189–228; Kenneth J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 247; David Braid, “Personal Narrative and Experiential Meaning,” *Journal of American Folklore* 109, no. 431 (Winter 1996): 6; Charles Tilly, *Why?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 79–84; and, Ken Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. Paul Atkinson, et al. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 396. See also, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 77.

8. Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 396.

everyday life, and have not been obstructed by researchers;⁹ rather, they *are observed* by researchers in everyday settings. For example, while sitting in a coffee shop I overheard the following conversation among four white, female, high school students: “Did you hear the joke Mr. White told in history today? He is so racist,” Student One said in a surprised tone. “Yeah,” Student Two replied. “No, I didn’t hear it,” replied Student Three. Student One proceeded to tell the joke and all three women laughed. In a public space, and under a ‘disclaimer’ intended to establish that the teller is not racist, these three white students shared in a naturalistic life narrative.¹⁰ Researched life stories are the narrative responses that interviewees give as a result of formalized research conversations.¹¹ In this case, a researcher prompts interviewees to tell life stories by using questions designed to elicit specific information for analysis. The formalization of the conversation may not always reflect the spontaneity encountered in the moments of natural conversations. However, the restraint of interviewees to share their stories is dependent on the structure of the interview and the interviewer. Many of the interview examples already used in this dissertation demonstrate my interviewees’ willingness to fully express themselves. I will use the naturalistic narratives I have gathered from observations as well as the researched personal *whiteness* and *religious* narratives I obtained from interviewees’ responses to the questions I posed about race, gender, sexual identity, class, Christianity, religion, faith, church, and God.

9. Ibid.

10. Individuals offer a caveat in these situations, a disclaimer, to avert what would otherwise be considered an embarrassing social *faux pas*. “I don’t want to sound racist, but...” is a common example of this practice. Michael Bamberg calls these statements “counter claims” see his work, “Narrative Discourse and Identities” in *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality and Disciplinarity*, ed. Jan Christoph Meister, in collaboration with Tom Kindt and Wilhelm Schernus (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 225.

11. Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 396.

Life Narratives as an Expression of Identity and Belief

A person has a sense of who he or she is only through the sharing of life narratives with others; in other words, the self is constituted by life narratives which give expression to experience through social interactions.¹² Throughout their lives people identify with cultural tools that help to create a sense of self and a narrative identity.¹³ The creation of narrative identities is an ongoing process on several levels. First, narrative identity illustrates how individuals attempt to reconcile their understanding of the self over time. A person creates a sense of self over the course of her or his life, assuming new narratives from cultural and religious tools in order to adapt to new circumstances and disregarding others as they become less relevant.¹⁴ The life narrative an individual chooses to tell reveals not only how she or he wants to be perceived by others but also reveals how she or he perceives herself/himself.¹⁵

12. Debra Van Ausdale and Joe Feagin debunked the previously influential work of Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory with the argument that children as young as three years have the ability to apply racial knowledge to interpersonal encounters. Van Ausdale and Feagin's argument disproved the belief held by many white adults that children simply mimic behavior without any understanding of the implications because children do not have the capacity to make racial judgments and determinations. See Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

13. Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (London: Routledge, 1995), 172; Jerome Bruner, "Self-Making Narratives," in *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002), 210; Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative and Self-Concept," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 1, no. 2&3 (1991): 145; and, Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 32.

14. Bruner, "Self-Making Narratives," 210.

15. Bamberg, "Narrative Discourse and Identities," 224; and, Bruner, "Self-Making Narratives," 211. See also Charles Horton Cooley, "Looking-Glass Self," in *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings in Social Psychology*, ed. Peter Kollock and

Second, life narratives help bind individuals with groups and society; that is, the individual's narrative identity is interwoven with the prevailing cultural tools as well as the tools of the groups with which she or he finds affinity.¹⁶ In general, a person acquires the behaviors and values both of the society at large and of particular groups by adopting and adapting the society's and group's tools. This is true, according to George Herbert Mead, because, "an individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his [sic] social group and the structure of his [sic] self expresses or reflects the general behavioral pattern of this social group."¹⁷ Thereby, an individual becomes identified with the society and groups, and the society and groups are identified with her or him. I expect an analysis of the life narratives I have gathered will reveal how whiteness and religious beliefs function in the lives of white Christians and may also disclose the cultural and religious tools of the groups with which each interviewee identifies.

Jodi O'Brien (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1983), 266–8; and, Peggy J. Miller, "Narrative Practices: Their Role in Socialization and Self-Construction," in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, vol. 6, ed. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush, Emory Symposia in Cognition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 158–79.

16. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001), 74; Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 4; Maureen Whitebrook, *Identity, Narrative and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 40; Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 2; Edley, "Analyzing Masculinity," 190; Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 22; and, David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 61.

17. George Herbert Mead, "Mind, Self and Society," in *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*, ed. James Farganis (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 159. Herbert Blumer, based on Mead's understanding of the self, created the concept of *symbolic interaction*. See Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) and the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionism.

Life narratives shape a person's narrative identity by connecting him or her with cultural tools and the tools of particular social groups. As one acquires these cultural tools he or she uses them to explain and give meaning to personal experience.¹⁸ When a person tells a life narrative, she or he is attempting to make sense of an experience accessing its relevance to her or his life within the larger social context.¹⁹ According to Margaret Sommers, "To be sure, agents adjust stories to fit their own identities, and, conversely, they will tailor 'reality' to fit their stories."²⁰

To illustrate this point: Two years ago, I was on a flight to Denver to meet with my dissertation committee and was giving my attention to a reader on critical whiteness studies. The white, middle-aged man next to me stated, "That looks interesting." He then explained that he is an instructor at a metropolitan college in the southern United States. I explained my research. This presumably educated, professional, white, heterosexual, Christian man responded as if wounded: "You can't think the church is responsible for racism?" A few moments later he stated, "You don't hear the story of Ham preached much anymore, unless you're Mormon. And they're really not Christians anyway."²¹

18. Martin Cortazzi, "Narrative Analysis in Ethnography," in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. Paul Atkinson, et al. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 385.

19. Cortazzi, "Narrative Analysis in Ethnography," 385; and, Whitebrook, *Identity, Narrative and Politics*, 9–10.

20. Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 618. See also Laurel Richardson, "Narrative and Sociology," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 19, no. 1 (April 1990): 129.

21. The story of Ham, also known as the "Curse of Ham," can be found in Genesis 9:20-27. In the story a drunken Noah is found lying naked in his tent by Ham. Ham sees Noah's nakedness but does nothing to cover him. Ham tells his brothers about Noah's nakedness and they go to cover their father. Noah later hears of Ham's indiscretion and curses him, Ham's youngest son Canaan, and Canaan's heirs to a life of enslavement. In the Middle Ages the idea that Ham's descendants were blackened by their sin became a part of the European/Christian collective discourse. In the 18th century the Curse of Ham

Over the next twenty minutes he told me story after story about the persecution of his family due to the racial integration of neighborhoods and of his relationships with persons of color. He also gave me his theories on the current “race problem” between blacks and Latinos/Latinas in the city in which he lived. “I think the Latinos have a better work ethic than the blacks. So, the blacks are upset by this.” He then turned away for his “traditional in-flight nap.” Later, as we prepared to exit the plane, my new in-flight friend had one more comment: “When you meet with your committee, start out by telling them a joke. Tell them that those folks doing biological studies in the 1920s and ‘30s were right.” I responded, “That’s not funny. In fact, it’s racist.” He huffed and we parted ways.

This man used his life narratives and religio-cultural tools to counter my claim that white Christians’ religious narratives perpetuate oppression. He needed me to know that he had been a victim of ‘reverse racism,’ and in doing so disclosed his own racism and prejudices against blacks, Latinos/Latinas, and Mormons. It was, at least at the time of our conversation, impossible for him to think the church, *his Church*, could have any part in oppression; therefore, he used his own life narratives to attempt to disabuse me, and himself, of any such notion.

Just as life narratives help an individual explain experiences and create a narrative identity, they also serve as a site where an individual’s actions and beliefs can be reconciled. In other words, a person tries to defend the choices she or he made in a given situation by giving an account of his or her actions.²² In telling a life narrative, an individual makes a claim about his or her personal notions of right and wrong while

gained popularity in as a justification for the enslavement of Africans. For a comprehensive understanding of the Curse of Ham see, David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

22. Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 403.

simultaneously revealing what is socially acceptable according to that individual and cultural and religious tools.²³

In Chapter One I explained that for the last five hundred years the dominant cultural narratives of morality were rooted within the constructed tenets of white privilege; and they were maintained, at least in part, by the ever mutable characteristics of whiteness. The implication for white Christians in the U.S. is that their ethical decisions and, as I will demonstrate, their religious beliefs arise from and are informed by unearned social privilege solely on the basis that they are ‘white.’ Jennifer Harvey and colleagues, contend that:

White supremacy permeates theological and ethical reflections done by white people, not because we ascribe to overtly racist beliefs, but because white supremacy, in its institutional and social forms, structures how we think, know, and live.²⁴

One manifestation of this idea was found in sixty percent of the research subjects I interviewed. Interviewees referenced missionary or service work with the “disenfranchised” and “less fortunate” when they answered questions about being Christian and/or the role of the church in society. On the surface these answers reflect a certain class consciousness because those sixty percent did not include themselves in these categories; however, when asked to give specific examples of service work forty-five percent spoke about local projects and/or international projects in which the population is predominantly black or Latino/a. “Disenfranchised” and “less fortunate” are euphemistic racialized terms for blacks and Latinos/Latinas, and were utilized by the interviewees to justify their service projects. More importantly, these terms were included in the course of

23. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 38–9.

24. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 18.

the life narratives of interviewees, thereby indicating attitudes and beliefs about race.

Ruby Hayes²⁵, a church administrator stated:

We do a little store here for Christmas that we have all the congregation bring in gifts that are for 10, 20, or 30 dollars for certain age kids and we invite the moms *over there* to come in and shop...for gifts. And since I'm so aware of [issues of racism and] all the women that wanted to help were a bunch of white women in dresses I... tried to get, on purpose, *African American women and different types of women* that would come in and help. So that nobody would feel uncomfortable. Because we knew that would happen. To come in and have a bunch of white women waiting on you. You know, that you're *charity or whatever*. So we tried to work against it in those ways in making the effort to not be caring about outer appearance.

To her credit, Ruby admitted that she acted out of her awareness of racism and that her volunteers tried to create a more inclusive environment; nonetheless, she used a part of her white cultural tool kit to describe the “moms over there” as both “African-American” and “charity.” By using racialized terms in the telling of her life narrative about acting as a Christian, Hayes made it clear that even those white Christians who are working to eliminate racialization have difficulty escaping it.

In summary, life narratives can be a significant resource for understanding how people form their identity/identities, explain experiences, and reconcile both their own and other's thoughts, actions, and beliefs. I have argued that peoples' identities and experience are expressed in the life narratives they choose to tell, and thus reveal the cultural and religious tools of the groups with which they identify. Additionally, when individuals tell their life narratives they do so in a way that justifies or makes sense of their experiences; life narratives help people align how they act with what they believe.

Therefore, life narratives become an important resource for recognizing the cultural and

25. The names of interviewees have been changed and interviewee profiles can be found in Appendix A.

religious tools of whites because they provide the markers and a moral framework that people need to organize their lives.

Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology for Research

If it is true that life narratives will reveal a person's sense of self as well as the cultural and religious tools she or he uses to give meaning to experience and belief, then narrative inquiry is the most promising research methodology for analyzing those narratives. The basic format of narrative inquiry is to describe and interpret the narratives collected from the interview participants.²⁶ I chose conversational interviews as the means for collecting the raw material for an interpretation of the interviewees' personal understandings of whiteness and religious beliefs.²⁷ As the interviewer, my role was to serve as a "catalyst" by asking the questions that allowed and encouraged the interviewees to express their experiences.²⁸ While the detailed analysis of this is conducted in the following two chapters, it will be helpful to give a brief example of how narrative inquiry works.

Between 11 November 2007 and 28 April 2008 I interviewed twenty white Christians, primarily from Fort Wayne and North-Central Indiana, who were representative of twelve Christian traditions. The volunteer subjects were chosen from

26. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 46; and, D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 70.

27. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 63.

28. Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, Sage Series on Race and Ethnic Relations (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991), 62–3. Essed interviewed black women about their experiences of racism. Ruth Frankenberg also used a similar type of interviewing technique in her interviews with white women. See her book, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

local congregations as well as social networks, allowing for demographic representation in terms of gender, socio-economic status, and sexual identity. Interviewees were contacted to set-up two hour interviews in a location of their choosing. As a part of the interviews I asked the question: What does it mean to be a Christian? Of the twenty persons interviewed, forty percent talked about living by Jesus' example of loving God, neighbor, and self. Another forty-five percent of respondents emphasized salvation through the acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior and making disciples of the world. At first glance, it appears there is no consistency in these answers, but upon a closer examination, the common pattern was a focus on the ministry of Jesus. More importantly, these statements reveal two distinct sets of social and religious boundaries about what it means to be Christian. Those participants whose response focused on Jesus' teaching to love were more likely to be from a denomination or tradition which emphasizes works and deeds; these respondents were also more likely to be participants in ecumenical conversations and service missions.²⁹ Those who expressed the primacy of one's acceptance of Jesus as one's personal Lord and Savior were more likely not to be involved with a church community or to come from traditions that emphasized salvation and missionary work.³⁰ The social and religious boundaries of the former appeared to be more permeable because their stated focus was the greater good, while the latter group appeared to have more rigid social and religious boundaries based on the required acceptance of Jesus the Christ as foundational to any commitment to God and the church. This example illustrates how utilizing narrative inquiry as a method of analyzing the life narratives of the participants can reveal themes, commonalities and divisions within an interview group.

29. These traditions included the Church of the Brethren, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the Unitarian Universalists.

30. These traditions included the Assembly of God, Church of God (Anderson), and Missionary Church.

Narrative inquiry through conversational interviews raises several questions that require some discussion. Four of the critiques or limitations I will address are objectivity, validity, reliability, and integrity of interview. Attention to the details of life narratives is essential because what is said, what is not said, the context in which it is said, and the researcher/interpreter have particular impacts on the interpretation. Given the likelihood of multiple meanings in the material, there is no point in pretending that so-called objectivity exists.³¹ As a researcher who embodies many of the elements of the dominant socio-political order and white, middle-class comfort, it is necessary to disclaim objectivity in my research. I am acutely aware that I have control over this study's outcome and how the results are presented; however, this control is mediated by my advisory committee and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver.

Some may raise objections regarding the validity of the study because it is not replicable, and the number of participants was too small to qualify as statistically representative. By virtue of the very nature of their tasks, qualitative researchers cannot replicate a project or reproduce a given result because the interviewees answer questions at a particular time and in a specific place neither of which are replicable. Where the interview takes place, what has happened in the interviewee's life prior to the interview, and the memory recall of the interviewee in the moments of the interview are just a few of the factors that make interviews difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce.³² Nonetheless, the difficulties do not invalidate the data; that is, qualitative research is capable of "claim[ing] a degree of transferability insofar as it often raises issues and offers insights

31. Amia Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber, eds., *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 2.

32. Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley, and Craig J. Thompson, *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34. See also, Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 64.

which reach beyond the particularities of the situation.”³³ Qualitative research, in this case narrative inquiry, reveals patterns of behavior and speech. The location of this study is primarily greater Fort Wayne, Indiana. While I cannot guarantee identical results by replicating the study in the same place, the patterns revealed by this study align with those of Emerson and Smith.

A third critique of narrative inquiry concerns the reliability of memory as source material. Memories are the remembered, recalled, selective, and interpretive facts shared by the teller in ways which benefit the teller,³⁴ yet the teller is relating what she or he considers to be true. While what an individual remembers as ‘true’ is nearly always open to interpretation, memories are generally derived from central beliefs within the teller’s life. The researcher must discern these beliefs which inform the perspective, thinking, and actions of the teller’s day-to-day life. While an individual may not recall an event exactly as it happened, interview subjects do reveal the themes and ideas which give orientation to their lives. Given that the focus of this study is identity, religion and life meaning related to culture and race, these underlying beliefs, themes, and life orientation are especially significant and trustworthy as material for analysis.

Finally, there are questions to be asked about the integrity of the interviews themselves. Because I am an ‘insider’ in this study, a member of the same cultural group as the interviewees, some might ask if I am capable of a critical perspective. In other words, can I, as a member of a subject group, be objective?³⁵ It is well established that

33. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 47.

34. Michal Nachmias, “Early Memories as a Key to the Holistic Content Approach,” in *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*, ed. Amia Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 79. See also, Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 58.

35. R. Patrick Solomona, John P. Portelli, Beverly-Jean Daniel, and Arlene Campbell, “The Discourse of Denial: How White Teacher Candidates Construct Race, Racism and ‘White Privilege’,” *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 8, no. 2 (July 2005): 153.

many, if not most, white people either cannot see their biases or are willfully ignorant of their privilege; even so, a certain bias exists even if the researcher is *not* a member of the group being studied. The shortcomings inherent to being an insider are rendered insignificant by the benefits. As the researcher I have found that interviewees display an unexpected honesty and willingness to share their stories because I was an insider. Indeed I was allowed to ask clarifying questions and even probe into the lives of participants in ways that might have caused defensiveness if asked by someone from outside the subject group.³⁶ There was a level of inside- or group-speak that might not have taken place had I not been considered a member of the subject group. Interviewee April Samuels is a case in point.

Following more than an hour of our conversation about race, class, gender, and sexual identity I asked April if there was anything she wanted to add. She hesitated, and then stated she wanted to revisit the topic of racism and asked to revise her statement to include her belief that *all* people, not just whites, could be racists. She explained that, “[according to the media] Black people are never racist. And look at all the stuff they do. I mean, it’s always the white people who are the bad people.” She continued, “I mean, honestly, black people are probably the laziest people. I mean, they’re the ones complaining they can’t find a job [and it’s] because they’re too lazy to go out and find one.” I believe that April made these statements to me because she identified with me as someone who also came from a white working class background and therefore as a researcher with integrity. While every researcher is expected to be aware of nonverbal cues, as well as instances of silence and denial, one who is a part of the subject group will be more likely to recognize these unspoken phenomena. Hence, another benefit for being

36. Philomena Essed reports similar interactions in her work see her book, *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 67. See also, Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 298.

an insider is the greater likelihood of recognizing nonverbal cues; and indeed, it was April's nonverbal communication which prompted me to ask her for additional comments. Recognizing a strong likelihood for deeper sharing as a result of my insider status, and in response to potential critiques of suspect integrity, I assert that it is most important that the researcher be accountable to a larger group of people, such as fellow researchers, who can provide the oversight and external accountability to the way I work with material from members of this or any subject group.

Narrative inquiry, to summarize, is a research methodology that analyzes life narratives and the experience of individuals. It is a methodology that recognizes that an individual's experiences are a reflection of the narratives of the society and groups with which that person affiliates. It observes patterns that help explain the multiple narratives and tool kits at work in a person's life and within the larger society. The patterns I am looking for in this research project are the intersections of whiteness and religion that provide support for my dissertation thesis.

Applying the Methodology

The methodology I used encompasses both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative research was done mainly in the form of examining both regional and national statistics. However, the initial plan for the study included a mixed quantitative/qualitative research tool: an anonymous open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaires were to be distributed to one hundred people for the purpose of collecting data from a more generalized group of white Christians. The process of distributing the questionnaires included five steps: First, the random selection of five prominently white congregations from the greater Fort Wayne, Indiana area. The second step was correspondence with church leaders through phone calls and letters seeking permission to

use their congregations as a subject pool. Third, once I obtained permission from church leaders, announcements were to be placed in church bulletins informing the congregational members of the research being done. Fourth, twenty members from each congregation were then to be randomly selected to participate. The fifth step was to arrange for participants to receive the questionnaires and supporting materials via church mail.

The qualitative portion of the research involved interviewing twenty people. Ideally participants were to be self-selected from those who filled out a questionnaire. I planned to demographically balance the pool of participants by collegial referral or social networking. Participants were then to be given the option of participating in the confidential interviews and provided a way of contacting the researcher. However, in the end it was reliance on collegial referral and social networking which allowed the study to move forward. As I started to make inquiries with church leaders, it became apparent that the use of congregations as research pools was problematic. Pastors and church leaders were reluctant to participate in the study because of time, the belief that congregants did not have the ability to answer the questions, and/or the fear of controversy. I address the reasons for this problem in Chapter Three.

I randomly selected predominantly white congregations from the Fort Wayne/Allen County phone book. The racial make-up of the congregation was determined by an inquiry.³⁷ Eventually fifteen congregations were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Of the fifteen congregations contacted, only three congregations allowed for the distribution of materials.³⁸ As a result only sixty questionnaires were distributed, netting a

37. A congregation was determined to be predominantly white if whites constituted more than eighty percent of the membership. The eighty percent figure comes from the work of Michael Emerson and Rodney Woo in their book, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Emerson and Woo argue that a congregation is not multiracial if fewer than eighty percent of its members are from one racial group.

38. For a profile of the participating congregations see Appendix B.

combined return rate of twenty-three percent or fifteen total questionnaires. While not statistically significant, the mixed quantitative/qualitative format does allow for their use as support documents for the interviews. The response rate of those willing to be interviewed was five percent or three people.

Given that only three people from congregations were willing to be interviewed, it became necessary to utilize collegial referrals and social networks to elicit seventeen more participants. While the subject population was not as random as it could have been, the opportunity to use referrals and networks did allow for a well rounded set of demographics.³⁹

The purely qualitative portion of the study involved narrative inquiry through in-depth interviews of twenty people. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate the characteristics whites exhibit when talking about religion and/or the systems of white privilege. A map of the religious beliefs and white privilege characteristics was developed through analyzing data for consistency, repetition, and consensus in themes, plots, and actions. In order to achieve an understanding of the connection between religion and white privilege, two primary types of life narrative were collected from the interviewees: reflections about personal religion and personal understandings of the racial, gendered, and classed others in relation to the subject.

The process of collecting interview data consisted of the following five steps: First, the demographic data from questionnaire participants who were willing to be interviewed was analyzed for gender, sexual orientation, and class representation. Second, persons were solicited through collegial contacts and social networks in order to create a balance demographically. Third, interviewees were contacted to set-up one to

39. The use of non-random research subjects is supported in both Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism* and Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*. Both Essed and Frankenberg use subjects suggested to them through personal relationships and colleagues in their respective fields.

two hours of interview time at a location of their choosing such as church, office, or coffee house. Fourth, interviewees were asked a series of questions prompting life narratives. Fifth, interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed.

Conclusions

I have argued that life narratives are central to understanding the beliefs of white Christians because these shape and reshape a person's cultural and religious tools, and, ultimately, a person's narrative identity. This happens by the person connecting with the cultural and religious tools at work in society and among social groups. It is only as a person lays claim to cultural and religious tools that she or he can give meaning to what is experienced. Life narratives are also the site where individuals harmonize their beliefs and actions. In these narratives, persons reveal their beliefs.

Finally, given this significance of life narratives for understanding racism and white privilege, narrative inquiry was identified as the preferred research methodology. Narrative inquiry permits the researcher to analyze life narratives, seeking patterns to explain the multiple narratives and tool kits at work in a person's life. In Chapter Three I will employ a narrative inquiry approach to analyze the research participants' beliefs and thereby prove the existence of shared cultural and religious perspectives and bias.

CHAPTER 3

THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOOL KITS OF WHITE CHRISTIANS: ANALYZING THE DATA

I demonstrate in this chapter that white Christians as represented in this study have a spectrum of awareness about the ongoing racialization of society. Although some participants in this study were motivated by cultural or religious influences to work for more equality in society, the bulk of interviewees were unaware of their participation in the preservation of whiteness and white privilege. I found that the majority of participants' white cultural tool kits included contradictory whiteness narratives which allow participants to believe they are color-blind, not seeing another person's race, while also having a racialized worldview. I also discovered that the interviewees' religious tool kits contained narratives that perpetuated a disconnect between what it means to be a good person and assuming a sense of shared responsibility for the common good.

I came to my conclusions by employing the conceptual frameworks developed in the previous chapters. The first of these frameworks positioned my work in relation to Emerson and Smith's *Divided By Faith*. In addition, I argued that whiteness is both visible and invisible and continues to be reinforced by the cultural and religious tools of whiteness found in the sciences, laws, and Christian beliefs which proclaim white privilege. These tools have been used to create social boundaries as well as racial, gender, political, and social hierarchies. The creation and re-creation of these hierarchies continues to this day.

The second framework I developed indicates that a person's sense of self and narrative identity is bound up in the cultural tool kits of a society as well as the tool kits of

the groups with which she or he finds affinity. Recall, cultural and religious tool kits are a collection or repertoire of cultural and religious resources that contain tools such as narratives that people pick up or put aside depending on the situation or problem they face. The second framework develops out of the understanding that self is expressed by life narratives; as a person tells a life narrative she or he does so to justify or make sense of her or his experiences. In addition, life narratives are also used to help align people's actions with their beliefs. The implications of this are that as a person tells a life narrative, they reveal what is socially acceptable according to the dominant culture and affinity groups within it. Therefore, by using narrative inquiry to analyze life narratives, one can determine how cultural and religious tools are used to perpetuate whiteness, racism and white privilege. As I discuss below I discovered eight white cultural tools including color-blindness, merit, color-isolation, imposition, status, language, gestures, and family inheritance. In addition, I discovered four white religious tools: accepting Christ, living a Christ-like life, good intentions, and paternalism.

Setting the Context

Before beginning an analysis of the white cultural and religious tool kits and life narratives I recorded, I would like to provide a sense of the context in which the interviews were conducted. It is necessary to set the context because each local situation is different and impacts how people respond to the questions they are being asked. As I argued in Chapter Two and mentioned again above, a person's life narratives are shaped not only by the cultural and religious tools of the groups and local community within which he or she participates, but also by the tools of the larger society. Greater Fort Wayne, Indiana was the context of the twenty interviews I conducted beginning in November 2007 and concluding in April 2008.¹ Ninety percent of the research

1. For a detailed account of the research methodology see Chapter Two. For the research instruments used to collect interview data see Appendix C. See Appendix A for

participants lived in Allen County or within forty-five minutes of Fort Wayne.² The county has a total population of approximately 350,500 people of which eighty-four percent are white.³ The median household income for 2007 was \$47,947, and approximately eleven percent of the population lived below the federal poverty line.⁴ Demographically the interviewees are among the ethnic majority, and the majority (15/20) have an annual household income of more than \$50,000.

Three major national events informed the context of the interviews. Hurricane Katrina had struck New Orleans, Louisiana on 23 August 2005. The interviews took place only two years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. During Katrina, eighty percent of the city of New Orleans suffered flooding as a result of overwhelmed levee systems. At the time of the interviews it was reported that the hurricane was responsible for at least 1464 deaths in Louisiana, of which sixty-one percent were non-white.⁵ The number of persons and families displaced by the hurricane still living in temporary trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency was 81,633.⁶

interviewee profiles.

2. The ten percent (2/20) of the participants not currently living in the greater Fort Wayne area reside in central Indiana. They were chosen as participants to ensure representation from the queer community as well as the economic upper class.

3. U.S. Census Bureau, "Allen County Quick Facts" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), [Http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/18/18003.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/18/18003.html) (accessed 06 October 2009).

4. Ibid.

5. Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, "Reports of Missing and Deceased" (Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, 2006), [Http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/page.asp?ID=192&Detail=5248](http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/page.asp?ID=192&Detail=5248) (accessed 06 October 2009).

6. Louisiana Recovery Authority, "Hurricane Katrina Anniversary Data for Louisiana" (Louisiana Recovery Authority, 2006), 1, [Http://lra.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/LouisianaKatrinaAnniversaryData082206.pdf](http://lra.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/LouisianaKatrinaAnniversaryData082206.pdf) (accessed 06 October 2009).

With continued media coverage of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's failure to respond in a timely and comprehensive manner, the problems in and around New Orleans remained in the cultural tool kits of the country throughout the interview process.⁷ Katrina was still in the public consciousness because of daily media reports and criticisms about how FEMA and the George W. Bush administration failed to respond, or bungled their efforts. Critics accused the federal government of racism, citing the fact that much of the devastated area was inhabited by blacks and Latinos/Latinas.⁸

The second situation in the air at the time of the interviews was the increase in the public displays of rope nooses around the country. Rope nooses, historically a symbol for lynching, have been used for decades by racist whites and white hate groups as a tool of intimidation. During the time period of the interviews the Southern Poverty Law Center reported fifty incidents of noose-hangings across the United States, which was an increase of nearly four hundred percent.⁹ In the state of Indiana alone, there were reports of five separate noose-hangings which occurred just prior to and during the span of my

7. See, Michael Kunzelman, "Suit Filed Over FEMA Trailer Toxins," *USA Today*, 8 August 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-08-08-3178132946_x.htm (accessed 06 October 2009); Elisabeth Bumiller, "McCain Faults Bush Response to Hurricane Katrina," *New York Times*, 25 April 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/world/americas/25iht-25mccain.12333030.html> (accessed 06 October 2009); and, Becky Bohrer, "FEMA to Close Post-Katrina Trailer Parks," *Washington Post*, 29 November 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/29/AR2007112901248.html> (accessed 06 October 2009).

8. See for example, South End Press Collective, *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007); Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2006); and, Spike Lee, dir., *When the Levees Broke*, ed. Barry Alexander Brown, Geeta Gandbhir, Nancy Novack, and Samuel D. Pollard (40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks, 2006).

9. Mark Potok, "Behind the Noose," *Intelligence Report*, Winter 2007, <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=842> (accessed 06 October 2009).

interviews.¹⁰ This increase in noose-hangings came after the media and anti-racist activists highlighted the racial tension in the small town of Jena, Louisiana, which was catalyzed by the hanging of nooses from a tree at the local high school.¹¹ The tree was the place where a group of white students sat during the lunch hour. Toward the beginning of the fall semester of 2006, a freshman black student asked the principal if he too could sit under the tree. The principal told the youth he could sit anywhere he pleased, so the student sat under the “white” tree. The next day, three nooses were hanging in the tree. The white students responsible for the nooses received in-school suspensions. In the following days and weeks, several fights broke out between white and black students; and on 30 November, Jena High School was set on fire.¹² On 02 December, just days after the fire, a

10. The first reported noose-hanging was on the Indiana State University campus. Police recovered a noose that had been tossed into a tree on campus. See, Sara Kuhlman and Michelle Pattison, “Noose in Tree Causes Outrage,” *Indiana Statesman*, 26 October 2007, [Http://media.www.indianastatesman.com/media/storage/paper929/news/2007/10/26/Campus/Noose.In.Tree.Causes.Outrage-3058917.shtml](http://media.www.indianastatesman.com/media/storage/paper929/news/2007/10/26/Campus/Noose.In.Tree.Causes.Outrage-3058917.shtml) (accessed 06 October 2009). The second incident was reported at Purdue University when a librarian found what she believed to be a noose in a study area. See, “Purdue Police Seeking Information After Discovery of Noose-Like Object Found in Campus Library,” *The Exponent Online*, 8 November 2007, [Http://www.purdueexponent.org/?module=article&story_id=8325](http://www.purdueexponent.org/?module=article&story_id=8325) (accessed 06 October 2009). The additional events were a series of noose-hangings on the Eli Lilly Pharmaceutical campus. Security guards reported finding nooses on three separate occasions. See, “Continuing Noose Incidents at Eli Lilly Warrant Full FBI Investigation,” *TransWorld News*, 11 March 2008, [Http://www.transworldnews.com/NewsStory.aspx?id=39887](http://www.transworldnews.com/NewsStory.aspx?id=39887) (accessed 06 October 2009).

11. National Public Radio, “Beating Charges Split La. Town Along Racial Lines,” *All Things Considered*, 30 July 2007 (National Public Radio), [Http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=12353776](http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=12353776) (accessed 06 October 2009).

12. Wade Goodwyn, “Beating Charges Split La. Town Along Racial Lines,” *NPR*, 30 July 2007, [Http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12353776](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12353776) (accessed 06 October 2009).

black student, Robert Bailey, had a verbal confrontation with a white man, who decided to go to his truck to retrieve a shotgun. Bailey and a group of his friends wrestled the gun from the man, for which Bailey was arrested on several charges, including stealing a firearm--while the white man was not charged in the incident.¹³ The following Monday, a white student was heard “bragging” about the incident.¹⁴ He was subsequently beaten by six black students. Despite him suffering only minor injuries, the six black students, who became known as the “Jena Six,” were first charged with aggravated assault, a felony, but that was increased to second-degree attempted murder. The case brought national attention to Jena such that on 20 September 2007 the city was the gathering place for 10,000-15,000 supporters of the Jena Six who believed the youth, like other black men, had been treated unfairly by the justice system.¹⁵ The events in Jena sparked a white racist backlash which contributed to the increase of noose-hangings around the country. Media coverage kept these incidents fresh in the minds of the interviewees.

The third external factor that contributed to the context of the interviews was the 2008 presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, because they brought the cultural repertoires of race and gender to the public square. I argued in Chapter One that what is considered the “norm” in U.S. culture is exemplified in the white, heterosexual male, and evidence of this was apparent in the media’s treatments of Obama and Clinton. Questions about Obama’s blackness and Clinton’s femininity were common for much of the campaign--which happened because the normative model was, and is, the white male

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Maria Newman, “Jena, La,” *The New York Times*, 24 September 2007, [Http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/national/usstatesterritoriesandpossessions/louisiana/jena/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/national/usstatesterritoriesandpossessions/louisiana/jena/index.html) (accessed 06 October 2009).

politician. To wit, *Time* asked this question: “Is Obama Black Enough?”¹⁶ And several months later Civil Rights veteran Jesse Jackson, Jr. stated that Obama was, “acting like he was white.”¹⁷ Clinton was repeatedly critiqued about her gender identity. Take for example the media frenzy that followed Clinton’s campaign stop in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Clinton, while talking with a group of women at a coffee shop, welled up with tears as she talked about the rigors of political campaigning.¹⁸ Some pundits used the emotional moment as “proof” of women’s inability to control themselves emotionally while others used it to make accusations about Clinton’s authenticity.¹⁹ Additional examples can be seen in media critiques of Clinton’s decision not to appear in *Vogue* magazine because she was fearful of appearing too feminine.²⁰ The questions, critiques

16. Ta-Nehisi Paul Coates, “Is Obama Black Enough?” *Time*, 1 February 2007, [Http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1584736,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1584736,00.html) (accessed 06 October 2009) For responses to the question see, Marjorie Valbrun, “Black Like Me?” *Washington Post*, 16 February 2007, [Http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/15/AR2007021501270.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/15/AR2007021501270.html) (accessed 06 October 2009); Nancy Giles, “What Exactly Is ‘Black Enough?’” *Sunday Morning*, 4 March 2007, [Http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/04/sunday/main2534119.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/04/sunday/main2534119.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody) (accessed 05 March 2007); and, “Michelle Obama: Questions About Husband Being ‘Black Enough’ Silly,” *CNNPolitics.Com*, 1 February 2007, [Http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/02/01/michelle.obama/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/02/01/michelle.obama/index.html) (accessed 06 October 2009).

17. Nicholas Wapshott, “Obama Hopes Could Rest on Jena Case,” *New York Sun*, 20 September 2007, [Http://www.nysun.com/national/obama-hopes-could-rest-on-jena-case/63015/](http://www.nysun.com/national/obama-hopes-could-rest-on-jena-case/63015/) (accessed 06 October 2009).

18. Patrick Healy and Marc Santora, “Clinton Talks About Strain of Campaign,” *New York Times*, 7 January 2008, [Http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/us/politics/07cnd-campaign.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/us/politics/07cnd-campaign.html) (accessed 06 October 2009).

19. See, Crystal L. Hoyt, “Study Sheds Light on Reaction to Hillary Clinton’s Emotional Moment,” *University of Richmond News*, 15 January 2008, [Http://oncampus.richmond.edu/news/jan08/Clinton.html](http://oncampus.richmond.edu/news/jan08/Clinton.html) (accessed 06 October 2009).

20. See, Hadley Freeman, “Clinton Faces a Harsh Wintour,” *The Guardian*, 19 January 2008, [Http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jan/19/hillaryclinton.uselections2008](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jan/19/hillaryclinton.uselections2008) (accessed 06

and comments by the media and pundits made it clear that Obama and Clinton represented a breach in normative politics. In doing so, they placed pressure on socio-political boundaries which had been in place since the establishment of the United States. The possibility of either candidate being the future President of the United States created hope for many who were marginalized by the political establishment and, at the same time prompted fear in many whites who had benefited from the political establishment.

In addition to the cultural context created by the flashpoints of Hurricane Katrina, the noose-hanging and the Jena Six, and the Clinton and Obama campaigns, it is also useful to understand the religious context. It is helpful to have at least a broad-strokes understanding of the religious landscape of the United States at the time of the interviews, which I will describe using the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life's "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" and the observed attitude of Fort Wayne area church leaders toward participating in my data collection.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life's "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," which summarizes findings of a thirty-five-thousand person survey, conducted 08 May to 13 August 2007, provides three conclusions useful for establishing the national religious context for my interviews.²¹ The first and most useful conclusion of the survey was the finding of a clear corollary relationship between a person's religion and her or his socio-political attitude. While the survey did not specifically ask questions about racial attitudes, this finding supports the work of Emerson and Smith as well as my argument that religion and racism do have a relationship. Second, according to the Pew Forum survey, "The

October 2009).

21. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2008), [Http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#](http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#) (accessed 06 October 2009).

Midwest most closely resembles the religious makeup of the overall population.”²² This is significant given that my research took place in Fort Wayne, Indiana and several of the responses of the interviewees parallel the findings of the Pew survey. For example, the Landscape Survey found that “nearly two-thirds of the public (sixty-three percent) takes the view that their faith’s sacred texts are the word of God.”²³ However, the same data reveals that Christians who believe their sacred texts are the word of God are almost “evenly divided between those who say it should be interpreted literally, word for word (thirty-three percent), and those who say it should not be taken literally (twenty-seven percent).”²⁴ My research participants followed very similar patterns when referencing the Bible: those from evangelical traditions were literal in their interpretations, while those who were not affiliated with a church or belonged to non-evangelical Protestant traditions were split between literal (thirty-one percent) and non-literal (thirty-eight percent) interpretations. Third, the Pew survey reports that respondents cited their personal experiences as being the main influence on their political views and social behaviors.²⁵ This validates another of the primary arguments of this dissertation, namely that experience and religion shape a person’s sense of reality.

In addition to the Pew Forum survey, the observed attitude of church leaders toward participating in my research is another measure of the religious context at the time

22. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Summary of Key Findings*, Report 1 (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2008), 8, [Http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf](http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf) (accessed 06 October 2009).

23. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Religious Beliefs & Practices/Social & Political Views*, Report 2 (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2008), [Http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf](http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf) (accessed 09 October 2009).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 17.

of the interviews. Despite the evident importance of religion in the Midwest, there was considerable reluctance on the part of Fort Wayne churches to participate in my research and data collection. My original research plan was to randomly select five predominantly white congregations for participation in the study. After contacting fifteen congregations I found only three willing to participate in my study.²⁶ The reluctance of pastors and/or church leaders to participate in my study may be explained in a variety of ways. The time of the year that the study was conducted included the seasons of Advent and Easter, times in which the workload of the staff and pastors is substantially higher.²⁷ However, after speaking with several pastors who refused to participate in the project, I concluded that there were two additional reasons for their reluctance: First, six of the pastors whom I approached refused to participate because they believed their congregational members were incapable of doing religious reflection. These pastors saw religious reflection as something that could only be done by experts. Consider the following phone conversation with a pastor from a self-proclaimed progressive congregation: “I am not sure that many of the members of my congregation could answer the questions you are asking.” She continued, “I do have two young men leaving for seminary who might be able to help.”²⁸ In the pastor’s mind, the only two people in her congregation who were capable of

26. See Appendix B for congregational profiles.

27. Three of the pastors I approached shared that timing was an issue. Inquiries were made from late-October to March. These months encompass many high holidays for churches and are the busiest time for staff and pastors. In addition, the way materials were to be distributed also could have been problematic. I had to entrust the congregational support staff and pastors with the distribution of the materials due to Institutional Review Board directives. Since many church leaders and support staff members are overworked and underpaid, taking on one more task was not likely to be appealing.

28. Additional examples included a pastor who thought that his congregation would only be able to answer the questions as a group, and two pastors who believed their congregations too advanced in age or feeble-minded to participate.

religious reflection were two men preparing to attend seminary. Unfortunately, this pastor's understanding of religious reflection as a task best left to scholars and theologically trained church leaders was not uncommon. Just as disheartening is the second cause I identified for pastors' reluctance to participate: A denial of white privilege and the fear of controversy or rebuke from their congregations.²⁹ In these pastor's minds, the survey questions participants were asked to consider would do nothing more than create unnecessary agitation in an otherwise "peaceful" community. Apparently, if these potentially controversial topics are not a regular part of church conversations, then distributing questionnaires may invite unwanted political and religious controversy.

My dissertation research participants were influenced by general demographics, dominant social narratives, and contemporary religious attitudes. Demographically, the context of my research interviews was framed by middle-to-upper-class white Christians living in a predominantly white region. Socially, the context of the interviews was framed by increased racial tensions following Hurricane Katrina, the incidents of Jena, Louisiana, and the noose-hangings that followed. In addition, social boundaries of race and gender were being challenged by the Democratic presidential nominee campaigns. Religiously, the interviewees had similar attitudes to those throughout the larger United States; however, locally there was a reluctance on the part of church leaders to participate in open conversation about race and racism. It is out of this context that my research and narrative analysis developed.

29. Emerson and Smith address the fear and constraints of church leaders as a reason for why congregations remain homogenous. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164–7.

White Cultural Tools and a Heightened Awareness of Racialization

Recall from Chapter One that the United States is a racialized society; that is, “a society that allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines.”³⁰ The racial lines and social boundaries constituting whiteness³¹ are held in place by cultural and religious tools that maintain privilege for whites. My research data found³² that contemporary white identity and white privilege are managed and maintained by white cultural tools that result in a spectrum of awareness about racialization among whites about racialization. Recall, racialization is “characterized by low intermarriage rates, de facto segregation, socioeconomic inequality, and personal identities and social networks that are racially distinct.”³³ While my concern is with those white cultural tools that keep white privilege firmly in place, it would be unfair to assume that there was no awareness of racialization among my participants.

Thirty-five percent of the people I interviewed shared a clear awareness of the racialization of society and had made attempts to combat overt acts of racial discrimination at work and in their extended families.³⁴ It was also clear that these individuals were influenced by white cultural tools that were shaped by their education,

30. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 7.

31. Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 14.

32. The reader should keep in mind that due to the limited number of interviewees for this dissertation I am only able to write about the major themes I discovered and what they might imply about white Christians and their religious beliefs.

33. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 154.

34. The individuals who participated in my research, like those in Emerson and Smith’s work, were most often referring to overt acts of discrimination by whites toward non-whites when talking about racism. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 75 and 87.

families, and/or social groups who supported racial equality.³⁵ In other words, these tools stood in direct opposition to the racialization of society and instilled in the interviewees a sense of social responsibility. For example, Olivia Nolland, a high school teacher, discussed growing up in a household in which her father was overtly discriminatory in his actions and comments toward non-whites. Nolland had a turning point in her awareness and ideas about race while in college. In her late twenties Nolland decided she had heard enough of her father's bigotry and confronted him. As a result of the confrontation, Nolland's father stopped using the language, at least in the presence of her and her daughter. In addition Nolland discussed the ongoing conversations about discrimination she has with the students where she teaches. In another example, Lucas Allen, an advertising consultant, grew up in a household where the problem of racism was openly discussed. Allen attributed his awareness about white privilege and racism to his mother, who spent her summers in Chicago while in college. Allen explained that his work in the advertising field has provided him a variety of opportunities to express his vision of a pluralistic and inclusive society as well as to address clients about their assumptions. Nolland and Allen, like the other interviewees with a heightened awareness, utilized white cultural tools that supported acts to create racial equality.³⁶

White Cultural Tools, Color-Blindness, and Contradictions

While the thirty-five percent of the interviewees discussed directly above had a heightened awareness of racialization and white privilege as serious problems and worked

35. Emerson and Smith argued that one reason some whites were more aware of the problems of racialization was due to their level of engagement with non-whites. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 83–6. My research did not find the same correlation.

36. Given the low number of participants who had a heightened awareness of racialization there was not enough shared narratives to create distinct tool kit themes. However, these interviewees did attribute their perspectives to multicultural education and in some cases the influence of their mothers.

at overcoming the phenomena, the majority (sixty-five percent) of the interviewees were in the middle-to-the-end of the awareness spectrum.³⁷ The middle-to-the-end of the awareness spectrum is filled with white cultural tools that include contradictory whiteness narratives,³⁸ which demonstrate that whites have a racialized worldview even though they make claims of being *color-blind*, not seeing another person's race. In addition, many of the interviewees understand themselves to be free from making contributions to the ongoing problem of racialization in the United States, but, as Emerson and Smith note, people do not need to be intentional in their actions in order to contribute to the problem.³⁹ Interviewees who were situated in the middle of the awareness spectrum varied in their acknowledgement of white privilege as well as their willingness to work for racial equality. As I demonstrate below, whiteness and white privilege so profoundly shape the identity of whites as individuals, and as a group, that interviewees often slipped from making claims of anti-racism into making bigoted statements, even in the same

37. The spectrum of awareness in this study did not include a racist or white hate extreme. While twenty percent of the interviewees used expressions that may be construed as overtly racist, they did not believe themselves to be a racist. The absence of overt white hate expressions in my study may be the result of two phenomenon: First, my pool of research participants was recommended through professional and social networks. It is likely that my friends and colleagues did not recommend any of their acquaintances that held overtly racist beliefs or may not know anyone who is a part of white hate organizations. Second, participants who did hold overtly racist beliefs would likely not share those views with me as an interviewer based on the their perceptions of my work. In other words, whites who hold strong white hate philosophies would likely not share them with me out of fear or mistrust.

38. Similar observations have been made by Richard Dyer and Howard Winant. See Richard Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 545; and, Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2004), 169.

39. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 9 and 110.

conversation.⁴⁰ These contradictions are apparent if one considers that the majority of whites are quite aware that it is socially unacceptable to be overtly racist, but at the same time may be oblivious to the automatic privileges of being white, which are deeply ingrained in their lives.⁴¹ The fact that most whites are aware that it is not acceptable to be overtly racist is one element in what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has identified as “new racism,” which is constituted by “[racist] practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial.”⁴² I observed this new racism when sixty percent of my research participants claimed to be color-blind. Consider the following comments by Craig Donaldson: “Race, creed, color, religion, sexual orientation all that stuff doesn’t matter. To me it doesn’t matter. I am more interested in who you are as a person. I expect excellence.” Donaldson’s statements demonstrate a commonly held belief among whites that they have successfully ceased participating in any ongoing systems of racism because race is no longer relevant to them. However, many of these same interviewees later made statements or told stories which demonstrated their awareness of racialization. The level of paradox was significant enough to warrant further analysis. I therefore examined each type of narrative used as a part of the white cultural tool kits individually in order to demonstrate how each helps maintain racialization and white privilege.

40. Ruth Frankenberg, “The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” in *Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 77.

41. Thomas Ross, “Innocence and Affirmative Action,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 29.

42. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Oxford: Rowmann & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 3. See also, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001), especially Chapter Three.

Merit

The first white cultural tool is *merit*, the belief that people are judged solely based on their abilities. I found the tool of merit in the life narratives of sixty percent of participants. My findings are similar to those of Emerson and Smith who reported that nearly seventy-five percent of respondents believed racial inequality exists because of a lack of motivation; in other words, blacks had not earned racial equality.⁴³ Therefore, when a person is discriminated against, it is because of his or her personal deficiencies, and not skin color.⁴⁴ There are at least two reasons that many whites believe in merit rather than socio-political structures as the basis for a person's place and/or success in society: Whites understand themselves to be individuals, and they misconceive the nature of privilege.

Whites, by and large, understand themselves to be individuals rather than members of any racial group.⁴⁵ They have been led to this understanding by a progression of events and conditions that date to the late-fifteenth century and the narrative that came with them--not least of which was the colonial dominance of white culture. Although a clearly defined concept of individualism was not recognized until the seventeenth century, the power of whites to define cultural, a key component of contemporary individualism is an outgrowth of the rigidly defined racial boundaries and white social power created in the late-fifteenth century. It is these boundaries that helped make white culture normative.

43. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 99–103.

44. Amanda E. Lewis, "Some Are More Equal Than Others: Lessons of Whiteness From School," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 161. See also, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 105.

45. Emerson and Smith discussed this phenomenon in white evangelicals in terms of race being "compartmentalized." According to the authors, "Race is not a focal point in their day-to-day lived experience" [71]. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*.

Those in the dominant white culture have always been the *subjects* of culture, those who set the parameters of the normative culture, rather than the *objects* of culture, those who are designated as outside the norm.

Whites remained the subjects and definers of culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the so-called European Enlightenment came the concept of racial hierarchy based on science. The ideas of racial hierarchy, informed by two-hundred-plus years of cultural dominance, cemented the notion of white society as superior to all other people and civilizations. Some scholars credit Enlightenment thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, with creating the idea of liberal individualism as idealized in white men with property, and emphasized individual independence, individual liberties, and individual freedoms.⁴⁶ The result of this history of white cultural dominance coupled with Enlightenment ideals is a legacy of a worldview in which it is easy for whites today to believe that individuals exist outside social structures and are, therefore, individually responsible for their choices and decisions.⁴⁷ From within this perspective of individualism, whites often believe they can choose when and how they relate to their race. For example, when a person is accused of being a racist, he or she may deny his or her relationship to the white community by claiming to be different from other whites.

For instance, very early in my interview, Ralph Meyers volunteered that he was not a racist because he never thought of blacks or “Mexicans” as different, but as “an oddity.” His reasoning for not being raised a racist was his lack of exposure to “them” while growing up. Later in the interview Meyers stated, “You were better off being white than

46. C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 263–4.

47. For a detailed account of whiteness and liberal individualism see Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*, Revised and Updated (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 27-8.

any other color in this country up until a decade ago. It's easier to be white because if you are not white, people think you are wrong." He continued:

The opposite is overstated too: Blacks complain now about how they were treated in slavery times. Well, gosh, come on. Let's get real. Let's look at now. What happened back then is back then. I have always had the privilege of being white but it did not mean anything while I was growing up because there were no blacks around anyhow.

These comments reflect both Meyers' claim to be an individual who is color-blind, and the ease with which he identifies with the white community when he chooses. Meyers is convinced that he is different from most whites because he is not racist, yet he defends the white community against charges of racism by blaming blacks for refusing to let go of the past.⁴⁸ He illustrates how whites often value merit through his obvious ignorance as to how privilege works in society.

Whites have been educated to believe that a person earns her or his social status through achievements. Such beliefs not only have led to misconception by whites of how privilege works in our society, but also to the failure to acknowledge that social, political, and economic advantages aggregate whites as a group.⁴⁹ It is true that, to a certain degree, a person can change his or her social status by engaging in certain activities, such as pursuing a higher education, enlisting in the military, getting married, and having children, to name a few. Nonetheless, in the United States, an individual's social status is almost exclusively a function of privileges which are granted or denied based on the individual's race, gender, sexual identity, physical ability, and age. The primary reason that a change in socio-political status is extremely unlikely is this reality that privilege is

48. For similar results see, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 102–3.

49. Nancy Ditomaso, Rochelle Parks-Yancy, and Corinne Post have made similar observations in their research. See, Nancy Ditomaso, Rochelle Parks-Yancy, and Corinne Post, "White Views of Civil Rights: Color Blindness and Equal Opportunity," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 196.

determined by the group(s) with which a person can be identified.⁵⁰ For example, a white, male, and able-bodied person likely will be granted a high degree of privilege within the current U.S. culture. Conversely, a non-white, female, and/or disabled, person likely will be afforded fewer or even no privileges. According to Allan Johnson, “race privilege is more about *white* people than it is about white *people*.”⁵¹ Generally speaking, whites believe that every individual has the option to change her or his life because again, generally speaking, whites have not been inhibited by the socio-political and legal systems that have operated the last 500 years.⁵²

Color-Isolation

Color-isolation is the next narrative from the white cultural tool kit used by whites to explain race in the United States.⁵³ A white person is “color-isolated” if, regardless of intention, he or she has no ongoing relationships or interactions with non-whites. Color-isolation is a result of thinking the racial make-up of a community is happenstance or natural; however, the composition of U.S. communities is the result of racialized socio-

50. Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, Second ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 34.

51. Ibid.

52. Charles Mills has argued that whites have privilege because of the racial contract that makes racial discrimination the norm of society. See his *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Ian F. Haney Lopez has argued that state and federal courts from 1878 to 1944 defined the characteristics of whiteness establishing who is legally white. See his *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

53. Emerson and Smith have argued that the degree to which whites are isolated from non-whites correlates with their willingness to see racism as a structural problem. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 80–6. My research data did not find the same correlation. In fact, many of the interviewees who were aware of the problems caused by racialization were just as isolated as the other participants.

political practices of the past.⁵⁴ Eighty percent of the people I interviewed shared narratives of color-isolation. These past practices have created what Amanda Lewis called a “*de facto* segregation” [italics in original]; that is, racially established communal boundaries not associated with any official policies.⁵⁵ The primary manifestation of “de facto segregation” is that whites are not forced to interact with groups from whom they have been historically segregated. The people I interviewed expressed two types of color-isolation from their white cultural tool kits and both result from de facto segregation; however, before I identify and discuss them it will be helpful to have a brief outline of the factors in Indiana’s history which produced de facto segregation as it exists today.

Historically Indiana’s legal code included a law in place from 1848 to 1868 that banned blacks from migrating to the state.⁵⁶ In addition, following the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) many Indiana towns and counties also had a “sundown law,” a policy that made it illegal for blacks to be out after dark. These and other similar policies and laws were on the books in Indiana from the 1890s to the mid-1980s with reports of some of these practices taking place as recently as 1998.⁵⁷ These laws and policies were only part

54. Lewis, “Some Are More Equal Than Others,” 163. Emerson and Smith make a passing reference to de facto segregation with regard to contemporary “segregation by choice” as well as the segregation that followed the Civil War. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 11 and 37.

55. Lewis, “Some Are More Equal Than Others,” 164.

56. James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005), 27. The year 1868 marks the passing of the 14th, 15th, and 16th Amendments (a.k.a. the Reconstruction Amendments) to the U.S. Constitution which gave black men some civil rights.

57. Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 67. See also, John Bartlow Martin, “The Rise and Fall of D.C. Stephenson,” in *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*, Ralph D. Gray (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 306. Similarly, interviewee Brian Hendricks said he saw a “Whites Only” sign posted at a bar in South Bend, Indiana in late 2006.

of the forces arrayed against blacks in Indiana; they also faced the ostensibly unofficial policies and practices enforced by the Ku Klux Klan (also known as the K.K.K. and the Klan). During the late-Nineteenth and early-to-mid-Twentieth centuries the K.K.K. was a racist, anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, and anti-immigrant organization that claimed to “support law enforcement and traditional morality.”⁵⁸ In 1924 the Klan in Indiana claimed membership of 250,000 to 500,000.⁵⁹ Historian Leonard Moore reported that:

Between one-quarter and one-third of all native-born white men in the state paid ten dollars to become Klansmen during the 1920s; in some communities, the figure was as high as 40 to 50 percent. ... [These figures] do not even include the thousands of women who joined the auxiliary order, Women of the Ku Klux Klan, or the Junior Klan for Children.⁶⁰

The K.K.K. was the largest organization of any kind in the state, and its influence on Indiana politics and laws was unparalleled by any other political group. Even today, the impact of Indiana’s Klan and formerly formal segregation policies have created contemporary de facto segregation in the form of isolation.

Eighty percent of my interviewees reported that they had been “isolated” from the problem of race and racism because they were raised in communities in which there were very few, if any, non-whites. This statement by Misty Greene is representative of what was said: “There weren’t many [blacks] growing up because of where we lived.” She continued, “I don’t know, I mean... I knew blacks. Was I friends with any? Probably not,

58. Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921–1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991), 9. The K.K.K. is still active as a hate group in Indiana, with reports that there are at least five chapters in the state. The Klan today is less anti-Catholic but has added homosexuals to its list of targets. For up-to-date information on the on Klan see, the Southern Poverty Law Center, “Active U.S. Hate Groups in 2008: Ku Klux Klan,” *Intelligence Report* (2009) (Montgomery: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009), [Http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/type.jsp?DT=7](http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/type.jsp?DT=7) (accessed 12 December 2009).

59. Martin, “The Rise and Fall of D.C. Stephenson,” 307.

60. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 7.

because there were not any around, which is the case for a lot of folks.” The fact that many interviewees thought of themselves as isolated from issues of race is not surprising given the history of Indiana’s racial segregation, since the oldest of the participants was born in 1930. These racialized policies, discussed directly above, were designed to isolate whites from non-whites and the de facto segregation that remains in place today has the same result, namely color isolation.

De facto segregation has also meant that many whites have the option of choosing to live, work, and transact business in the same predominantly segregated areas as they did before official/legal segregation was outlawed. For example, Craig Donaldson stated, “Although I have friends that are people of color, I don’t spend a lot of time interacting with the African American community as a whole or the Mexican-American community.” In fact, seventy percent of my interviewees lived, worked, and socialized in places that are predominantly white and interacted very little with non-whites.⁶¹ Indeed, a white person can go days and even weeks without interacting face-to face with someone who is not white. The fact that a white person can most often *choose* where and when to interact with non-whites constitutes a type of white privilege. Everything a white person could need or want, such as hospitals, schools, libraries, government offices, churches, grocery stores, restaurants, and shopping centers can be found in many cities on the de facto ‘white’ side of town; while the person who lives on the “black” or “Hispanic” side of town has no such accommodation. In the Fort Wayne metro area, all but one of the major hospitals/medical facilities are located on the north or west (predominantly white) sides of town, and there are no hospitals on the economically depressed south side which is

61. The remaining interviewees had two different types of response: Ten percent reported that although they lived in predominantly white areas they had daily contact with non-whites throughout the day with regard to places they conducted business or worked. The other twenty percent of interviewees reported living and working in areas that were racially diverse and thus resulted in more contact with non-whites.

predominantly “black” and “Latino/a.” Similarly, U.S. Postal Branches and the state and city offices are more accessible on the north/“white” side of town. While the phenomenon of whites legally distancing themselves from racial minorities has been on the decline nationally over the last forty years,⁶² the evidence shows that de facto racial segregation still exists in the greater Fort Wayne area. That is, middle- and upper-class whites live in the suburban areas and north side of Fort Wayne, while poor whites, blacks, and Latino/as live near downtown and the south side of town.

Color-isolation derives from the legal and practiced segregation of the past and remains in place today through de facto segregation. The results of this de facto segregation are isolation. Interviewees discussed not being aware of the problems of race/racism due to being isolated in all white communities while growing up. However, several interviewees also discussed not being in sustained contact with blacks and Latino/as as they moved throughout their daily lives.

Imposition and Status

My research also found that the white cultural tool kits of the interviewees contained narratives of imposition as well as narratives of status. Narratives of imposition occur when whites claim that “all people” deserve equal treatment and opportunities, but those same whites feel like there is an undue burden placed upon them when equity comes at the loss of white privilege. According to Delgado and Stefancic, claims of imposition happen when:

We decide the group has gone far enough. At first, justice seems to be on their side. But now we see them as *imposing*, taking the offensive, asking for concessions they do not deserve. Now they are the aggressors and we the victims. [italics added]⁶³

62. Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby, “Religious Influences on Understandings of Racial Inequality in the United States,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (2007): 263.

63. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, “Imposition,” in *Critical White Studies*:

Forty percent of interviewees included within their overall tool kits a narrative of imposition.⁶⁴ According to Parker Wallis, “There is no doubt that whites have been privileged, but things are changing. I think when we went to Affirmative Action it was a disservice to blacks, now it is disservice to whites.” Wallis continued, “Enough is enough.” The narrative of imposition turns the situation of oppression on its head, as whites who have benefited the most from social and economic privilege name themselves as victims in the unfolding of racially-charged social interactions.

This idea of victimhood⁶⁵ and the resulting contradiction of equality as a burden borne by whites can be traced back to the idea of the autonomous individual, described in the preceding section, and the mistaken belief that the Civil Rights gains of the 1960s created total social, political, and economic equality for all people. Indeed, many if not most whites believe that all persons regardless of race, gender, and economic status have equal opportunities for the pursuit of happiness, and those individuals and groups who ask for anything more are imposing on the rest of us (whites) what amounts to “special” rights. Not only are narratives of imposition informed by this false assumption, they are also expressions of white privilege. When a dominant group believes it is being asked to change or to give up something by a “minority” group, the former assumes the role of

Looking Behind the Mirror, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 98.

64. Ibid.

65. The idea of white victimhood has been marshaled out over the past five to six centuries of European and Amero-european history to justify the use of violence against already oppressed and colonized people. For example, the lynching of black men by white mobs in the United States was often “justified” with accusations by white victims of sexual assault, insulting whites, homicide, and/or robbery. See, Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1962); and, Christopher Waldrep, ed., *Lynching in America: A History in Documents* (New York: University of New York Press, 2006). For an account of lynching related specifically to Indiana see, Cynthia Carr, *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, A Haunted Town, and the Hidden History of White America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007).

preserver of the status quo. The status quo in the U.S. is socially, politically, and economically advantageous to whites and is, by default in the mind of some whites, *as it should be*. To be a member of the dominant group is a privilege, and not to be given away. Let's examine the following story of imposition which took place in a predominantly white congregation, as told by Ruby Hayes, a church administrator:

We started out on our journey of being intentionally multi-cultural or multi-racial and it's been a process.... When we first were being intentional in having African American people on our staff and really going out and finding them, we kept running into a wall. [Church people were saying] they are this or that, or they're not really conforming to our standard as far as timeliness, or.... So those are the things we had to deal with. And then when we talked about music and how we worship. I've got to tell you I'm thinking the church overall, the staff overall, without saying it out loud [thinks]: "Okay, we white people can do it all sorts of ways so lets just be white and we'll do jazz, we'll do gospel, we'll do samba and Latino and we'll do it all." But it's just been funny in how we had to finally say it was a power issue. It's a power issue in how we do things. But we're certainly willing to be multicultural. But don't take away our power. We want to be the majority, we want to have the power here and the authority and I'm not saying it because I embrace that, I'm saying it because its reality. Oh sure, we'll have some African Americans work here and be here. As a senior pastor? I don't know. That kind of thing you know. So we still have a ways to go.

Hayes' congregation says they want to change, yet the members are not ultimately willing to change how things have been done in the past; they are not willing to cede their power and control and the resulting privileges. For many in Hayes' congregation, newcomers must conform to the existing community standards, otherwise these newcomers would be imposing their needs and desires on the community. Imposition reveals how well intentioned whites help to maintain racialization by demonstrating their willingness to work for equality but also insisting on enforcing of the already existing social boundaries and customs.

The narratives of status are stories told by whites that situate their social location in relation to that of so-called "minority groups." My research indicated that many whites are not only aware of the social, political, and economic gains made by non-whites, they

are resentful.⁶⁶ Thirty-five percent of the people that I interviewed talked about “reverse racism” and the “overcorrecting” flaws of Affirmative Action. The following comments by Caddie Collins are representative: “I almost think that some of my brothers of color have been benefiting by their color.” Later, Collins added:

I grew up seeing and hearing the love of Christ, and not seeing “I got this appointment because I was black!” [or] “Well you got that appointment because you were white,” you know. So I guess I... And I’m not trying to simplify a big problem but... You know, we went to something a few years back and I sat there and really felt like color was being used inappropriately. And I did go up to the speaker [and to talk with him about it]. In the same hand, doing a bar ministry with the Salvation Army later in my life before marrying [my husband], you know, there were people of color, people of non-color or whatever, that were honest and just, and there were people that used [race] to their advantage.

Brian Hendricks, a factory supervisor, stated that, “People at work get really pissed when Affirmative Action comes up. Dude, if you want to see a group of guys get angry just bring up Affirmative Action.” When I asked Hendricks why the men he worked with got so angry he stated, “They think it’s bullshit that a woman or a black guy or a Mexican can get hired with less experience. These guys are busting their ass to get by.”

The feelings of resentment expressed in the statements by Collins, Hendricks, and some other interviewees are the result of three phenomena: an incorrect understanding of privilege, a pair of common false assumptions, and white denial. The first phenomenon that has led to the resentment by whites, as discussed in the above section, is based on individual whites not feeling as if they have benefited from white privilege. Collins and the other interviewees who registered resentment believed that any privilege they enjoyed had been *earned* and was certainly not a product or not a result of prejudiced socio-political institutions and systems.

66. Antony Alumkal has made similar observations in his research of white Evangelicals. See, Antony W. Alumkal, “American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis,” *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (2004): 205.

There are two false assumptions working to foster white resentment according to Ruth Frankenberg: that white people, due to government policies of affirmative action, are now an oppressed group;⁶⁷ and that whites believe “there is an ever present danger of ‘overcorrecting’ past inequality and placing whites in danger of victimization.”⁶⁸ These assumptions ignore systemic white privilege and have allowed whites to make claims that whites are just like any other racial group.⁶⁹ For example, Ralph Meyers commented:

I do not think Affirmative Action is still necessary. Things are much better than they used to be and now qualified whites are having a hard time finding jobs. We just need to get over it and move on.

Meyers’ comments not only confirm Frankenberg’s claims, they are also representative of fifteen percent of the people I interviewed.

White denial is a third factor in white feelings of resentment. White denial is the conscious or unconscious refusal to believe in white privilege because of the feelings of guilt it would generate. Whites *do not*, and in some cases *cannot*, acknowledge their privilege because to do so would mean acknowledging their participation in unjust and violent social and political systems.⁷⁰ It is much easier to embrace ignorance and blame

67. Frankenberg, “Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” 85.

68. Ibid.

69. Charles A. Gallagher, “White Racial Formation: Into the Twenty-First Century,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 10. Kristen Myers makes similar observations: see her, “White Fright: Reproducing White Supremacy Through Casual Discourse,” in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashly W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 137. See also, Frankenberg, “Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” 84–5.

70. Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series (New York: Routledge, 2006), 86. I am not suggesting a white apologetic just because some whites cannot acknowledge their privilege; rather I am arguing that some whites have not been given the analytical tools or language necessary to question their worldview. It is also necessary to acknowledge the limitation of choice that some whites, especially poor

the victims than it is to embrace the reality that she or he has inherited and often benefits from a more fulfilling, economically secure, and materially comfortable life by relying on and taking advantage of the oppression of others.⁷¹ To summarize, the narratives of status demonstrate that whites are aware of the socio-political gains, real and perceived, that have been made with regard to race, gender, and sexual identity. Not only are whites aware of these gains, some whites have come to resent them because whites believe the changes have created an unfair social, political, and economic advantage for “minorities.”

Language, Gestures, and the Family Inheritance

The narratives of language, gestures, and the legacy of a family inheritance were also used by whites as a part of their cultural tool kits. These narratives demonstrate that whites are conscious of race and that they have a “racial interpretation of everyday life.”⁷² Racial interpretation, which can also be called a racialized worldview, is so much a part of white “common sense” that some whites cannot help but notice coded racist *language*, distinctive *gestures*, and the unspoken *inheritance* used by and/or in the presence of other whites. These are the types of interactions that generally go without acknowledgement and are representative of what can take place when whites are alone with one another.

whites, have from within the system of white privilege and white superiority. Albert Memmi described a similar problem in the context of colonialism: “it is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its relationships.” See Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 20.

71. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 130. Ward Churchill has called this type of ignorance “willful and deliberate ignorance.” According to Churchill, “[this type of ignorance] is not synonymous with being unformed. It is instead to be informed and then *ignore* [author’s emphasis] the information. There is a vast difference between not knowing and not caring....” See his, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of U.S. Imperial Arrogance and Criminality* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003), 6-7.

72. Winant, *New Politics of Race*, 168.

Every person I interviewed shared a narrative recounting not only the overt racist events they witnessed in their past, but also the experiences of this new more subtle racism that took place in the days or weeks just prior to our conversations.

Coded racist language is the first narrative of this group that demonstrated a white racial interpretation of daily life, and these narratives were the most often discussed by my interviewees. Interviewees were asked, “How do you know if someone is a racist?” Seventy-five percent of the interviewees responded with phrases like, “language” or “how the person talks.” Most people are aware of the overt racist language used by whites to describe blacks, Latinos/Latinas, Native Americans, and other racially diverse groups. To be sure, the old racial epithets are still in use and quite easy to detect. The new derogatory language now used by some whites, however, is more difficult to identify due to its subtleties. For example, I recently overheard a conversation about race between two white, young adult men while sitting in a local library. One of the men stated, “There are two types of blacks: African Americans and niggers.” He continued, “African Americans are the ones who can at least act white....” For this young man “African American” was not a more politically correct way to label someone who is black; instead “African American” was a black person who was closer to being white than others.⁷³ It is clear from this example that for some whites there is a nuanced use of any racialized term. Unfortunately, the coded language referred to by some of my interviewees is even more nuanced and subtle. For example, Jim Peters stated, “I know people who call blacks ‘Canadians’ instead of the n-word when they want to talk about them in public.” Upon further research I discovered that the first documented case of a white person using “Canadians” to describe blacks was in 2003. In Texas, Harris County assistant district

73. This example of coded language aligns with W.E.B. DuBoise’s analysis of “double consciousness.” See, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 1–8.

attorney Mike Trent sent an email to a list of prosecutors and investigators that stated, “[Rob Freyer] overcame a subversively good defense by Matt Hennessey that had some Canadians on the jury feeling sorry for the defendant and forced them to do the right thing.”⁷⁴ Trent’s email confused some colleagues because the jury consisted only of Texans; however, other colleagues knew instantly the intent of the coded language.⁷⁵ Even more disappointing than the use of the coded language is the fact that only one person, a young black lawyer, raised a concern about the email.⁷⁶ Both examples, the nuanced use of “African American” and the coded use of “Canadian,” demonstrate a white racial awareness, rather than a color-blindness, of the types of language used by whites.

In addition to narratives of coded language, forty-five percent of the interviewees told narratives about the subtle racist gestures made by white relatives, friends, and co-workers. By gestures, I mean the changes in posture, body language, and nonverbal behaviors made by whites in the company of non-whites, such as locking car doors, clutching a purse, and moving to the other side of the sidewalk. One of the most frequently discussed gestures by the interviewees was the “gaze” or the, “looks that [white] people give” non-whites. Parker Wallis stated, “How do I know if someone is racist? It’s in the looks they give blacks.” Although white scholars have only recently begun to address the gaze, there is nothing new about this phenomenon.⁷⁷ Black writers

74. Lisa Falkenberg, “When is a Canadian not a Canadian?” *Houston Chronicle*, 23 January 2008, <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/falkenberg/5480917.html> (accessed 30 October 2009).

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. See for example, E. Ann Kaplan, “The ‘Look’ Returned: Knowledge Production and Constructions of ‘Whiteness’ in Humanities Scholarship and Independent Film,” in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 316–28; and, James W. Perkinson, *Shamanism, Racism, and Hip Hop*

and scholars have been discussing the racial gaze of whites for decades.⁷⁸ bell hooks addressed the gaze in terms of the terror she felt in her childhood. hooks wrote, “What did I see in the gazes of those white men who crossed our thresholds that made me afraid, that made black children unable to speak?”⁷⁹ She later continued, “Their presence terrified me. Whatever their mission, they looked too much like the unofficial white men who came to enact rituals of terror and torture.”⁸⁰ Today the white gaze exists, and for some non-whites it harkens back to the days of mob violence. For the people I interviewed, the gaze was just one among many subtle forms of racism displayed by whites when encountering non-whites.

Finally, white racial interpretations were demonstrated in narratives of family inheritance. Family inheritance refers to the racialized and racist language and stories whites heard in their childhoods and adolescence that they still hear in their minds when interacting with non-whites. The use of the term “family” here is intentional and significant due to the types of voices people reported to hearing in their heads. Thirty percent of the interviewees expressed narratives about hearing the voice of their father and/or uncles in their minds when in a stressful interaction with non-whites, especially blacks.⁸¹ Lynn Jennings stated, “[Racism] was ingrained and it is what you hear in your

Culture: Essays on White Supremacy and Black Subversion, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas, *Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 191–3.

78. See for example, Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); James Baldwin, “On Being ‘White’ and Other Lies,” in *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*, ed. David Roediger (New York: Schocken Books, 1999), 177–80; and, DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

79. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1992), 170.

80. *Ibid.*, 171.

81. My research showed a strong connection between interviewees’ memories of

subconscious.” When asked how the racism of her childhood still impacts her today Jennings replied, “I still hear those words [from my father] sometimes. Even though I do not believe those comments or terms to be true... it’s been there for so long it just comes.” Similarly, Craig Donaldson, a musician and teacher, recounted that he regularly heard in his head the racial slurs used by his father when “stressed out.” Since these terms and racial slurs are always “in the back of [one’s] mind,” some whites must continually navigate their use. According to James Perkinson, “We are living history, walking syntax, talking tropes. When ‘white speak’ offers its seductions, do we play or pay?”⁸² In other words, how does a white who person hears the voices of the past in their minds choose to respond? Many of the interviewees who used narratives of family inheritance admitted having to censor themselves before verbally engaging the other person. Brian Hendricks stated in his interview, “When I am driving and I get cut off by someone African American I hear the voice of my Dad say, ‘Fuckin’ nigger!’ And it’s all I can do not to say it.” For many whites family inheritance is the racial interpretation they struggle with daily, regardless of their own sense of being color-blind or willingness to work for change.

To summarize, the narratives of language, gestures, and inheritance that some whites use from their cultural tool kits reveal that whites have a racialized worldview. The life narratives of the interviewees exposed the use of coded racist language, racialized

the use of racist language and the prominent male figures in their childhood. Contrarily, interviewees remembered their mothers and prominent women in their lives as those who either remained silent or rebuked the use of racist language in the home. Timur Kuran and Edward McCaffery found that regardless of the context men are more tolerant of discrimination than women. Kuran and McCaffery also found that most people expressed an acceptance of an “equality norm.” See Timur Kuran and Edward J. McCaffery, “Sex Differences in the Acceptability of Discrimination,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 228–38, especially 236. For further discussion of the gendered use of racist language see, Vron Ware, “Island Racism: Gender, Place, and White Power,” in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 283–310.

82. Perkinson, *Shamanism, Racism, and Hip Hop Culture*, 10.

gestures, and the legacy of a family inheritance of racialized language when in the company of non-whites. Each interviewee, regardless of her or his own anti-racist position, told stories about both historic as well as recent racist events they had witnessed, which also revealed these dynamics.

Thus far I have argued in this chapter that white identity and white privilege are managed and maintained by narratives from white cultural tool kits. Most of the whites I interviewed believed themselves to be color-blind. However, those same whites utilized narratives that unveiled a clear racial consciousness. Whites are not only aware of race, their worldview is substantially codified in racialized narratives from their cultural tool kits. I demonstrated this by discussing four sets of narratives: the narrative of merit; the narrative of color-isolation; the narratives of imposition and status; and finally, the narratives of language, gestures, and family inheritance. The remainder of the chapter will be spent analyzing the religious tools of white Christians.

White Religious Tools and a Heightened Awareness of Racialization

Just as there are white cultural tools that keep racialization in place, so too are there white religious tools. As I argued in Chapter Two, religion is one of the frameworks that individuals and groups use to give meaning to their life experiences. One reason people look to religion is because it helps to provide “legitimization for the world as it is.”⁸³ Religion in the lives of many white Christians over the past five hundred years has served to legitimize the racial status quo and the maintenance of white privilege.⁸⁴

83. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 17.

84. This is not to say that groups and individual white Christians have not worked to create social and racial equality. See for example the work of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) with regard to slavery at the Quaker Collections at Haverford and Swarthmore Colleges, “Quakers and Slavery Project,” <http://trilogy.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/about/> (accessed 01 September 2010). For examples of white individuals motivated by their religion to create change see, Myles Horton, *The Myles Horton Reader: Education for Social Change*, ed. and comp.

However, there was a spectrum of awareness about racialization found in the white religious tools of the interviewees. On one end of the spectrum were the fifteen percent of participants who discussed their congregation's work to create a more multiracial and welcoming worship experience and church community. All of the participants in this group felt that becoming a multiracial congregation was a part of their duty as Christians.⁸⁵ Ruby Hayes had this to say about the work of her church to become more multiracial:

We started out our journey of being intentionally multicultural, multiracial. It's been a process and I'm sure we have a long way to go yet. Because every time we learn something new we realize how far we have to come yet.... We're learning and growing and changing. [Pastor James] is a guy on our staff and he does urban ministry, but he is a very solid African American leader. But part of his role is to just help us [the predominantly white congregation] understand what [being black] is and how to embrace it. And he's a gifted speaker so he speaks on Sundays and so he's a teaching pastor here too. But he can teach us a lot.

Hayes and the other leaders in her church have been working for several years to make the congregation more racially diverse. While Hayes was very happy to discuss the progress

Dale Jacobs (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); and, Vincent Harding, et al., *Anne Braden Racial Justice Organizer*, Veterans of Hope Pamphlet Series no. 2 (Denver: Veterans of Hope Project, 2004). For a more generalized understanding of the role of religion in the creation positive social change see, Christian Smith, *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and, Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-Violent Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

85. Emerson and Smith have discussed the evangelical "racial reconciliation" movement and the efforts made by some evangelicals to create multiracial churches. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 52–68 and 127–9. See also, Alumkal, "American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era," 198–205. For an extensive look at the movement to create multiracial churches see, Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also, Brad Christerson and Michael Emerson, "The Costs of Diversity in Religious Organizations: An In-Depth Case Study," *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 163–81; and, Nancy Wadsworth, "Bridging Racial Change: Political Orientations in the United States Evangelical Multiracial Church Movement," *Politics and Religion* 3, no. 3 (2010): 439–68.

they had made as a congregation, she also demonstrated the high degree of frustration I found in this group of participants. She stated:

[Whites] want to be the majority, we want to have the power here and the authority and I'm not saying it because I embrace that, I'm saying it because its reality. Oh sure, we'll have some African Americans work here and be here. As a senior pastor, I don't know. So we still have a ways to go, and on one hand I can make fun of it, but if you shake up the congregation so much they can't take their journey with you and they're going to fall off. So, we're all trying to take this journey where we get it.

Hayes' level of frustration and her vision for what the congregation can be are congruent with Emerson and Smith's argument that religious leaders, "can to some degree shape the direction of the group, yet if they stray too far from the felt needs of the group, from comforting and uplifting the group members, their authority and power are weakened and may be rejected."⁸⁶ The other two interviewees with similar awareness felt paralyzed, like Hayes, because they could only make incremental changes. According to Judy Elsworth, "My husband and I started attending [our church] because of the social justice commitments. I have changed a lot in focus and breadth and [the church] offered several opportunities to allow both of us to grow in many different ways. But change has taken a long time."

Unfortunately, the participants who connected their understanding of Christianity with a charge of becoming a more holistic community, and therefore more racially diverse, were in the minority. The overwhelming majority of participants distanced themselves from the systemic racialization of society.

86. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 167. Similarly, Antony Alumkal has discussed an ideological gap that exist between leadership in laity in mainline denominations. See, Antony W. Alumkal, "Racial Justice in the Protestant Mainline," in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Jacobson and Nancy Wadsworth (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Forthcoming).

White Religious Tools and the Social Responsibility Disconnect

In addition to the contradictions found in white cultural tool kits, I found that interviewees' white religious tool kits contained narratives that allowed participants to disconnect themselves from any social responsibility for the racialization of society. This was most pronounced in interviewees' narratives about what it means to be "good" and their relationship to the "poor" and "disadvantaged" of society. As will be demonstrated below, many of the people I interviewed believed that 'being good' was something accomplished by individuals; in addition, they were unaware of how their life was connected to non-whites. As argued earlier in the chapter, whites generally do not think of themselves as a part of a racial group, but rather as individuals. It was, therefore, not surprising to find that white Christians interviewees thought of goodness in individualized ways. Interviewees' concepts of being good consisted primarily of being a moral person, being a good citizen, and helping other individuals in need. Furthermore, they assume that if a person is good she or he is making a positive contribution to society or the common good.⁸⁷ The logic works like this: If a person is good, then she or he is morally upright; and, if a person is morally upright, then he or she will be a good citizen and will assist persons in need. Therefore, when white Christians think about their contributions and relationship to the common good or greater good of society it is in individualistic terms. Some whites do not understand that their socio-political gains often come at the expense of someone else.

My research data was congruent with that of Emerson and Smith and confirmed that white Christians, regardless of their religious tradition/denominational affiliation, rarely thought of themselves as a racial group and, therefore, rarely consider their

87. Emerson and Smith found similar results with evangelicals and resolving the problem of racism. According to Emerson and Smith, evangelicals understood the only way to resolve the problems created by racism was through one-on-one relationships. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 118.

participation as a racial group in socio-political power structures. For example, seventy percent of the interviewees believed Christianity and the church teaches individuals to be moral and good. This information is not new. Most congregations understand their public role to be the creation of good people and good citizens.⁸⁸ However, seventy-nine percent of these same interviewees also discussed their churches' lack of engagement with issues of systemic oppression and in many cases with anything that was remotely political or controversial.

The disconnect from social responsibility is at the heart of racialization; that is, an individual Christian can be moral and good while demonstrating very little if any awareness about her or his community's participation in and contribution to oppressive and/or unjust socio-political systems. I will devote the remainder of this chapter to a discussion of the narratives that allowed participants to disconnect themselves from any responsibility for the racialization of society.

The Social Responsibility Disconnect and the Normalization of Racialization

As noted directly above, the religious tools of white Christians allow them to disconnect themselves from the social responsibilities and the problems created by the racialization of society. My data indicates that the interviewees believed a Christian can be a good person even if that person ignores his or her participation in or relationship to unjust social systems.⁸⁹ Unlike the interviewees' claims to be color-blind I discussed

88. Nancy T. Ammerman, "Connecting Mainline Protestant Churches with Public Life," in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 131.

89. Ruth Frankenberg discusses a similar phenomenon which she calls "power evasion." Frankenberg's power evasion consists of two points: the act of whites blaming individual "bad" whites for racist behavior as well as the avoidance of questions about power by her interviewees. According to Frankenberg, "The women I interviewed grappled with and tried to pacify the contradiction between a society structured in

earlier in this chapter, this disconnect is typically unacknowledged in white communities: white Christians are only concerned about what it means for them to be good as individuals, and are oblivious to many of the socio-political systems which do not affect them directly.⁹⁰ Within white Christianity, individualism plays a large role in fostering this disconnect.

White Protestantism and the church perpetuate the idea of the autonomous individual, as argued earlier in the chapter. This is accomplished through the churches' teachings about the success and failure of individuals. According to the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, sixty-seven percent of religious Americans believe "that with hard work most people can get ahead."⁹¹ This belief places all the responsibility on the individual for her or his life's circumstances and ignores the influence of systemic oppression. Forty-five percent of the people I interviewed held these beliefs. Consider the following statement by Misty Greene:

To me everyone has the opportunity to do what you want. The opportunity is there; it is how you take care of it. We all have opportunity. Look—we all get or are offered an education. But we don't all take advantage of it.

dominance and the desire to see society only in terms of universal sameness and individual difference"[149]. See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), especially Chapter 6.

90. Allan Johnson reported similar observations by human resource managers who work with dominant groups. See his book, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, Second ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 74.

91. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Religious Beliefs & Practices*, 103. The term "Religious Americans," in the Landscape Survey is based on a sampling of "the religious affiliation of adults, who represent only about three-quarters of the U.S. public. Moreover, as the Landscape Survey illustrates, a significant percentage of Americans have only a vague denominational identification (that is, they tell us they are "just a Baptist" or "just a Methodist"). In fact, many Americans are simply unclear about the religious group to which they belong, ensuring a degree of ambiguity in any survey-based measure of affiliation." Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey".

This sentiment is reinforced by Protestant individualism and the idea that “each person is first and foremost an individual before God.”⁹² The belief that people can get ahead with hard work can also be found in the popular statement, “God helps those who help themselves.”⁹³ Brian Hendricks had this to say:

I think that abiding by those moral values [found in the bible] and having faith in God and not letting, you know.... Not letting that faith be changed, you know.... I don't know, just standing behind what your faith is, you know is what helps you get what you want.

The “common sense” logic among white Protestants then becomes that whatever experiences a person has, either positive or negative, are the result of that person's devotion, piety, and prayer practices which are ultimately signs of her or his relationship with God. Such a belief informs how individuals distance themselves from social responsibility by allowing people to completely disregard the power of socio-political structures, thereby making individuals solely responsible for their life circumstances.

Thus far, I have established that the major contradiction found in white religious tool kits is rooted in an individualistic understanding of goodness and a lack of knowledge about or recognition of socio-political systems. For most of the interviewees, good came from individual morality, active citizenship, and acts of kindness. Being good, as a result, becomes about individuals doing good and ignores the socio-political systems in which whites participate. What follows are illustrative white narratives about Christianity presented by interviewees.

92. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, Chapter 5. See also, Janna Smartt Chance, “Obeying God Rather Than Men: Protestant Individualism and the Empowerment of Victorian Women” (Houston: Rice University, 2008), 7, [Http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/22217?show=full](http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/22217?show=full) (accessed 30 October 2009).

93. The origins of statement are debatable and although often attributed to Benjamin Franklin it is more likely this quote is from the work of Algernon Sidney. See Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack* (White Plains: Peter Pauper Press, 1980); and, Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2009).

Accepting Christ and Living a Christ-like Life

I will begin this discussion by describing a pair of narratives participants used from their white religious tool kits: the first I call the “accepting Christ” narrative, and the second I’ve designated the “living a Christ-like life” narrative. At first glance, one might think these should be similar; however, they are quite different, although each serves to perpetuate the white Christian disconnect from social responsibility and racialization. While the first asserts a statement of belief as the heart of Christian faith, the second asserts a system of ethical behaviors. Both narratives contribute to the disconnect of white racialized awareness if used by communities to measure personal piety and salvation.

For those using “accepting Christ” narratives, where a person will spend eternity is the most important aspect of faith. By focusing only on heaven, socio-political systems become irrelevant; after all, this life is merely temporary. Those who use the “living a Christ-like life” narrative believe that a person’s works and deeds are the center of her or his faith. However, while the “living a Christ-like life” group will give attention to socio-political systems, they often try to exclude themselves as contributors to those systems by providing a list of ways in which they have “given assistance” to the oppressed. Let us now consider each of these narratives separately.

Forty-five percent of my interviewees believed that to be Christian and/or to receive salvation means that a person must “accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.” This notion of “accepting Christ” is grounded in what is known as substitutionary atonement. The fundamental belief for these Christians is that the Fall of Adam and Eve in the second chapter of Genesis means that humans are in need of salvation. According to this perspective, God’s response was to send Jesus to be crucified to atone for the sins of humanity, and only those who accept Jesus as their savior and the single way to God will know eternal salvation. Thus, in order to be a good Christian a person must accept Jesus

as the Christ and to make his “gift” known to as many people as possible through proselytization. For the interviewees who professed the “accepting Christ” narrative, Bible passages such as John 3:16, John 14:6 and Matthew 28:19 are essential truths. The narrative of “accepting Christ” places much of the focus of Christianity on the individual gaining access to heaven.

Consider the following representative statement made by Parker Wallis, “[To be Christian means] to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord. Then it doesn’t matter what you do. I think there is a minor responsibility to not go astray, but ultimately I believe it’s about one’s confession of Jesus.” It is the latter part of Wallis’ statement that most clearly demonstrates disconnect from social responsibility by implying that once a person has confessed faith in Jesus then the rest of her or his actions are of little consequence. If a person’s actions are of little consequence, then it is highly improbable that he or she will care about systems of oppression. Comments from Kristen Mills contained an element of this anti-structuralism, “We [Christians] get to distracted by politics. Racism is a problem but we make it bigger than we need too. We should be concerned that we are right in the eyes of God.”⁹⁴ In addition, the disconnect from social responsibility can be seen in these interviewees’ idea of helping those in need, which came in the form of “saving souls.” This does not mean that other forms of assistance were not provided as a part of the church work, instead this work went hand-in-hand with “bringing people to Christ.” The disconnect from responsibility in this instance comes about as those professing the narrative of “accepting Christ” disregard the socio-political systems that may be creating the need for assistance, seeing the circumstances only as an opportunity to proselytize. My interview with Wallis contained proof of this type of disconnect when we discussed

94. Emerson and Smith argue that anti-structuralism is one the markers of white evangelicals. The authors demonstrate how anti-structuralism reinforces the individualistic perspective held by white evangelicals. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 74–80.

the importance of helping those in need. Wallis believed that Christians had some obligation to help those in need but his comments came with a caveat: "...we first need to be sure they are aware of the gift offered to us by Christ." For Wallis, and the other followers of the "accepting Christ" narrative, the concern was less about addressing the immediate needs of those receiving assistance than their eternal salvation. Their context and life conditions are not relevant or important. Thus, "accepting Christ" narrative contributes to the white disconnect of social responsibility by placing emphasis on an individual's confession of faith and what is to come in the afterlife. Such a individual-centered emphasis allows whites to remain oblivious to their contributions to the socio-political systems in U.S. society.

The second narrative, "living a Christ-like life," has developed from the belief that Jesus was sent by God to serve as a teacher and, as such, he left people with a set of ethical and moral guidelines. Thirty percent of the statements made by interviewees contained the "living a Christ-like life" narrative. The following comments by William Thomas are representative:

[To be Christian] means to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ which means to love your neighbor, fellow man, treat others as you want to be treated. It makes you a part of a community of believers who believe the same thing.

Thomas, and the other interviewees who used the "living a Christ-like life" narrative, believed that how a person lives is the most important indicator of her or his Christian faith; furthermore, judgment of who is a good Christian, who is living a Christ-like life, is determined by the members of his or her congregation. The common wisdom of those professing this narrative is that Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection were necessary to bring attention to a "new" or "alternative" way of living. Advocates of this "new way" can find their inspiration and guidance from biblical passages such as Matthew 5, Luke 4:16-20, and Matthew 22:34-40, which highlight Jesus' teaching to love and care for those in need. In order to fulfill their calling to be good Christians, the persons who utilize

the “living a Christ-like life” narrative participate in service projects and work to help the downtrodden in their midst,⁹⁵ in the greater community, and around the world. The disconnect from social responsibility occurs when those using this narrative try to differentiate themselves from the behaviors of the dominant white culture by touting the service and work they do on behalf of the poor and oppressed. In other words, the “living a Christ-like life” narrative can foster a false sense of exceptionalism and/or selective isolationism by the individuals who use it. For the participants who identified as Church of the Brethren or Mennonite this sense of exceptionalism is rooted in a historic understanding of church/world dualism.⁹⁶ This dualism allows individuals to believe that they are “in the world, but not of the world,” and therefore not active participants in unjust social structures. Don Clark made comments which revealed this type disconnect within his church:

There is a strong commitment in the congregation to social justice. I mean if rich people can have one. [Laughs.] You know, it’s very much a congregation that wants to be engaged in the community. The church does a lot of work locally. But someone who is not at least upper-middle class is not going to feel comfortable there.... We talk a lot about social justice but the truth is we are still a very white and wealthy community.

Recall from earlier arguments that privilege is granted to individuals based on the groups with which they are associated. It is nearly impossible therefore for white Christians to separate themselves from all the behaviors of the other whites in society. Not only is differentiation impossible, it is meaningless when the service work done by individuals and

95. Ninety percent of the interviewees who used the “living a Christ-like life” narrative are members of the Church of the Brethren or Mennonite Church U.S.A. which have long standing traditions of “mutual aid,” church members supporting one another in times of material, spiritual, and emotional need. Mutual aid is a core belief in all Believers’ Church traditions. For more information on mutual aid as well as Believers’ Church traditions see, Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1985), especially 264–82.

96. For a detailed explanation of church/world dualism see, Dale Brown, *Biblical Pacifism: A Peace Church Perspective* (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1986), especially 53–56.

congregations espousing the “living a Christ-like life” narrative has had little effect on how the individuals/congregations function, essentially making them no different from their middle and upper-middle class peers. The “living a Christ-like life narrative” thus creates a disconnect from social responsibility in white Christians by allowing churches and individuals to believe they are insulated non-participants in oppressive socio-political systems.

In summary, both narratives contribute to a white Christian disconnect from social responsibility: the narrative of “accepting Christ” does so by allowing Christians to focus on eternal salvation, rendering the social and political problems of this life unimportant, while the narrative of “living a Christ-like life” does so by placing an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus allowing believers to relinquish responsibility for unjust social and political problems under the guise of “living a different way.”

Good Intentions and Paternalism

The narratives of good intentions and paternalism are the second pair of white narratives about Christianity which demonstrate a disconnect from social responsibility. Narratives of good intentions are those stories told by the interviewees about times when they “tried to do the right thing” with regard to helping “the less fortunate” and “the disenfranchised.” Narratives of paternalism are the stories told by interviewees in which they believe themselves to be the most qualified to make decisions about how their money and others gifts are used by recipients.

The white disconnect from social responsibility as it specifically relates to the narrative of “good intentions” is found among people who believe they are working for a more just and equal society, but persist in (re)creating social inequalities. People who espouse the narrative of good intentions reinforce the white disconnect through an

emphasis on intentions rather than results.⁹⁷ When an individual or group is doing good for those they consider disadvantaged, they are able to disassociate themselves from any racist behaviors because their intentions were good. Such actions can quickly become symbolic and empty. For example, Misty Greene's congregation operates a food bank out of their church which is located in a predominantly black, low income neighborhood. The church's intention is to assist the disadvantaged and oppressed people of the neighborhood; yet, Greene recounted how the volunteers at the food bank would make racialized assumptions about the people coming in for assistance. According to Greene:

I have seen the same [prejudices] out of the people at the food bank. The volunteers, they don't mean it, but they assume this person is poor and lazy or something. They put everybody in the same class. Whereas when you are white people don't [make the same types of assumptions or] put you in the same class.

Greene further recounted that members of her congregation were upset when a black clergymen was appointed as the new priest. When she confronted some of the members they pointed to the food bank and after school program as a justification for why they were not racists. They have good intentions but have done very little to work on their own attitudes or to advocate for a lasting social change. The comments by Greene are representative of twenty-five percent of the people I interviewed.

This is all closely related to the second narrative in this pair: paternalism.⁹⁸

Paternalism, "perpetuat[es] relations of inequality by obfuscating strategies of social

97. Bradford Verter's research on racial justice activism in the mainline churches has resulted in similar observations about *good intentions*. See his article, "Furthering the Freedom Struggle: Racial Justice Activism in the Mainline Churches Since the Civil Rights Era," in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 183.

98. Emerson and Smith address the phenomenon of paternalism in their overview of the racialized history of the United States and the rebuilding of the South after the Civil War. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 38.

control through expressions of affection and concern.”⁹⁹ In other words, white Christians may offer gifts or assistance to a non-white group promoting the well-being of the non-white group but in doing so may inadvertently reinforce the established racialized social hierarchies. This is especially true when there are conditions placed upon the recipients of the gift. The relationship between this and the narrative of good intentions can be stated as follows: White Christians will help people in need but with the stipulation that their donations must be used in a specific way; in other words, the aid offered must not be used for purposes that conflict with the values and preferences of the white Christians. The donor requires such stipulations because he or she knows what is “best” for the beneficiary, and at the same time the benefactor feels as though she or he has made a positive contribution. The beneficiaries in a paternalistic relationship are never granted the status of being an equal because the white Christian benefactors maintain control in terms of resources and relationships. I found this narrative among twenty percent of interviewees.

A contemporary example of the narrative of paternalism can be seen in the following statement made by Theresa Adams:

It is a good thing we are there to help out. I am glad we actually give them food and not just money or something. Ninety percent [of the people we help at the food bank] are black, I can use that word with you, right? [Interview continues.] We are getting more Mexicans and very few whites. The other thing I find interesting is that very few of these families have a male. We ask the women if they are head of the household and out of the twenty-one families last week I had two males. One was a single man who came for food and one was where there are two men living together. The Mexicans, when they come it is a family. They probably just came up from Mexico. The African-Americans have no males. One woman had six children living with her.

Adams’ comments reflect paternalism in two ways: First, it is assumed that the church

99. Bradford Verter, “Furthering the Freedom Struggle: Racial Justice Activism in the Mainline Churches Since the Civil Rights Era,” in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 183.

presumes to know that the best help it can give these “black” and “Mexican” families is food, rather than money. Second, it is presumed that the best structure for a family is to have a man as the head of the household. Furthermore, no input was sought from those needing the assistance regarding how the church could be most helpful. Her narrative perpetuates a white disconnect from social responsibility because she not only believes she is being a good Christian by “helping” the “disadvantaged,” she is unaware of how this relates to the larger problem of racialization.

Christians use the narrative of good intentions to explain what they intended in a given situation, even if their work fails to bring about sustained social change. White Christians who use the narrative of paternalism are also working to assist “the least of these;” however, in doing so, they insist on maintaining control of the resources.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that the white Christians represented in this study demonstrate a spectrum of awareness about racialization which develops from their white cultural and religious tool kits. For a small group of the interviewees, their cultural and religious tool kits have led them to work for racial equality. For many of the participants the narratives from their cultural tool kits revealed a belief that they are color-blind. However, their narratives also revealed a racial consciousness and language for discussing race. The interviewees’ religious tools demonstrated a disconnect about what it means to be good with regard to social responsibility. These white Christians, when using their cultural and religious tools, often created reasons to excuse themselves from the ongoing problems of racialization and white privilege. The result of combining these tools, as I argue in Chapter Four, is the maintenance of whiteness, white privilege, and racialization by white Christians regardless of their intent.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOOLS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF COUNTERVAILING INFLUENCES ON RACIALIZATION

I argue in this chapter that when the cultural and religious tools of white Christians are combined they create several religio-cultural tools which preserve whiteness, racism and white privilege, and are counter-productive to any positive work done by white Christians to eradicate racism. Recall, cultural and religious tool kits contain resources people use to make sense of their experiences. I came to these conclusions by using a five step process: First, I established how my work joins the discussion framed by Emerson and Smith's *Divided By Faith*, furthering their arguments by researching an ecumenical group of Christians. Second, I formulated an argument for how cultural and religious tool kits provide a foundation for individual beliefs and self identity. I then argued that these beliefs and practices are reflected in an individual's life narratives. Third, using narrative inquiry and conducting interviews, I collected the life narratives of twenty white Christians from greater Fort Wayne, Indiana. Fourth, I used narrative analysis to examine the life narratives of the interviewees. What I discovered from that narrative analysis was a spectrum of awareness about the racialization of society and white privilege. The life narratives participants used from their cultural tool kits revealed an awareness of overt racial discrimination and bigotry which was acknowledged as unacceptable. In addition, participants with few exceptions, understood racism solely as racial discrimination and bigotry, and used the terms interchangeably.¹ Given the participants narrowly defined

1. Emerson and Smith reported similar findings. See, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.

understanding of racism, it was no surprise to find a majority of interviewees believed themselves to be color-blind. However, on further analysis I discovered that many of these same participants demonstrated a racial consciousness and language for discussing race. This is because the majority of participants, like those in Emerson and Smith's study, understood the problems of race in individualistic rather than structural terms and as a result blamed the problems on "bad" individuals.² I also found a set of narratives that interviewees used from their religious tool kits. Very few of the interviewees made direct connections between their religious beliefs and practices and race. Those who did make the connection between their religion and racialization were actively working to create a more inclusive environment both at church and in the community. The majority of interviewees' religious tools demonstrated a disconnect between what it means to be a good person and social responsibility. In other words, I discovered that while many Christians understand themselves to be good people their religious tools help them to explain away responsibility for contributing to the racialization of society.

This chapter focuses on the fifth step of the process by which I came to my conclusion. What follows is an explanation of how cultural and religious tools, when combined, construct religio-cultural tools that maintain whiteness, racism, and white privilege. However, before moving into this explanation it is necessary to pause and reiterate the role of church traditions in the maintenance of whiteness throughout U.S. history.

The Connection Between Church Traditions and Whiteness

The relationship between church traditions and whiteness is very complex. The creation of the contemporary understanding of race is rooted in European Christianity which make it difficult at times to distinguish between when religion is reinforcing

2. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 74.

whiteness or whiteness has influenced the religion. Recall from Chapter One the reason for such complexity can be traced back to monogenesis and the theological crisis created by European colonial expansion. The European church needed a way to explain the racial and cultural differences encountered by so-called European explorers in Africa and the Americas. Over the next couple of centuries the theological justifications for racial differences were conflated with Enlightenment philosophies about race. The intersection of European Christianity and Enlightenment philosophy provides the basis for race relations and the social boundaries of whiteness in the United States. One example of this can be seen in the commonly used term *Caucasian* which came to prominence in 1776 with the publication of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*. Blumenbach argued that human beings are of one species but are represented in five different degenerations: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malaysian.³ The term *Caucasian* comes from the Caucasus Mountains/Caucasus region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and has biblical significance. Due to the presence of sea shells, the Caucasus Mountains were believed by some biblical geographers to be the final resting place of Noah's Ark and thus the possible point of origin for post-flood humankind.⁴ Blumenbach's theory of degeneration maintained that all species have varieties that exist in nature and arise from a primeval model. The human

3. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, "The Degeneration of Races," in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 1997), 79. For a detailed account of Blumenbach's work see Nell Irvin Painter, "Why White People Are Called 'Caucasian?'," *Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race*, Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale (New Haven, 2003). Painter argued that while Blumenbach is credited with the term *Caucasian*, it was a term he borrowed from his colleague Christoph Meiners.

4. Hannah F. Augstein, "From the Land of the Bible to the Caucasus and Beyond: The Shifting Ideas of the Geographical Origin of Humankind," in *Race, Science and Medicine: 1700–1960*, Walter Ernst and Bernard Harris (London: Routledge, 1999), 58–79.

species and its variants derive from the primeval model of Caucasian and degenerate by degrees to the Ethiopian. For Blumenbach this was based on observations of skin color, skull, hair, and facial features; accordingly, he declared that the Caucasus region produced “the most beautiful race of men” because they had the “most beautiful form of the skull.”⁵ Blumenbach’s theory helped to solidify racial hierarchies in the dominant cultural narrative by making Caucasian a reference for both white and Christian boundaries. Caucasian designates whites as the model against which all other peoples are measured. It also makes claim to Christian superiority by attaching the highest form of humankind (whites) to the Hebrew Bible’s story of the flood. In the twenty-first century Caucasian is now a taken-for-granted categorization and lives on in the dominant cultural narratives.

While the relationship between whiteness and Christianity is recognizable, tracing the relationship between a specific church or denomination and its role in the maintenance of whiteness is very difficult due to the invisibility of whiteness. As discussed throughout this dissertation, whiteness undergirds the cultural and religious norms or “common sense” found in the United States. Whiteness often goes unnoticed or unacknowledged. The problem this invisibility creates for tracing the genealogy of any one church or denomination is that there is little material from which to work beyond the occasional public statement, sermon, or decree made by church leaders about race or racism.⁶ Further complicating the problem is the attitudinal gap found between church leaders and congregants.⁷ Nonetheless, attempting to trace the history of race relations in two of the

5. Blumenbach, “The Degeneration of Races,” 86.

6. In order to really ascertain the racial attitudes of any one church or denomination a researcher would need to make extensive use of primary documents held in denominational archives and personal collections.

7. See, Antony W. Alumkal, “Racial Justice in the Protestant Mainline,” in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Jacobson and Nancy Wadsworth (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Forthcoming); and, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 162–6.

most prominent denominations found in my study will demonstrate the historic relationship of churches to the social structures that maintain whiteness.

First, the Church of the Brethren is a denomination that traces its roots back to Germany in 1708. The church was founded by a small group of people who had an affinity with the beliefs of the Anabaptists and Radical Pietists.⁸ Upon immigrating to the United States (1719-1740)⁹ the Brethren settled in Pennsylvania among the Religious Society of Friends and the Mennonites. Brethren joined Friends and Mennonites in opposition to slavery and advocated for the fair treatment of American Indians.¹⁰ In 1782 and 1797, the Brethren re-affirmed their opposition to slavery at their Annual Meeting. Further, at the 1797 Annual Meeting the church, “added requirements for slaveholders who wished to become members of the church.”¹¹ However, it is also acknowledged that some church members continued to own slaves and to advocate for slavery as an institution.¹² The Annual Meetings of 1835, 1845, and 1875 addressed queries about receiving black members and the exchange of the holy kiss between members of different races. “Annual Meeting affirmed that no difference should be made because of skin color and urged black members to bear with their weaker Brethren.”¹³ The late nineteenth and

8. For a history of the Church of the Brethren see, Donald F. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren 1708–1995* (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1997).

9. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 59.

10. John W. Lowe, Jr., “Minorities, Ethnic and Racial,” in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), 849.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

early twentieth saw an increase in evangelization among black communities which led to the development of several black leaders and the establishment of black congregations.¹⁴

In the twentieth century, the Church of the Brethren had a mixed response to racial inequality. Officially and unofficially, the Church of the Brethren and its members worked for racial equality and yet there was also an acknowledgment of continued discrimination.¹⁵ For example, several Brethren in the mid-twentieth century were involved as advocates for racial equality during the Civil Rights movement as well as with service projects in predominantly black communities. Further, in 1988 the church received its first black moderator, A. William Hayes. However, according to historian Donald Durnbaugh, “Hayes was critical of the slow pace of the integration of minorities as full participants in the life of the church.”¹⁶ Speculations about why the Church of the Brethren is not more racially diverse can be seen in the *Brethren Encyclopedia* entry, “Minorities, Ethnic and Racial:”

The relatively small number of persons from these minorities among all the Brethren groups may be due in part to the rural heritage and continuing rural background of many Brethren. As the Church of the Brethren has moved to more cosmopolitan settings, the emphasis upon working with racial and ethnic minorities and the number of members from various races and ethnic groups has increased.¹⁷

Officially, the Church of the Brethren has established an “Intercultural Ministries,” which is devoted to working toward creating a, “culturally inclusive church, and to work proactively and diligently on identifying and eliminating stumbling blocks within denominational structures, traditions, ideology and polity.”¹⁸ An example of a stumbling

14. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 555–8.

15. Lowe, “Brethren Encyclopedia,” 851.

16. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 560.

17. Lowe, “Brethren Encyclopedia,” 851.

18. Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, “Becoming a Multi-Ethnic Church” (Elgin: Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 2007),

block that helps to keep the white social boundaries in place is the “name game, making connections with strangers by unearthing shared ancestors or acquaintances.”¹⁹ The purpose of the “game” is to establish a bond in order to “dissolve strangeness.”²⁰ The two strangers work together until they can find a connection to one another through bloodlines or shared experiences. While the “name game” creates bonds of kinship among some strangers, it can also “underscore the marginality of others.”²¹ It is all but impossible for newcomers as well as those outside the white ethnic heritage of the Brethren to feel anything but excluded from this seemingly benign “game.”

The Church of God (Anderson) is the second denomination I wish to highlight. The Church of God (Anderson) began in 1881 as a movement to restore the primacy of the Holy Spirit and the bible as the guides for faith rather than denominational polity. As a result, the Church of God (Anderson) has a congregational polity and governance structure.²² The church is heavily influenced by Wesleyan theology and Radical Pietism. It believes:

in the divine inspiration of Scripture; forgiveness of sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of the believer; the experience of holiness; the personal return of Christ, unconnected with any millennial reign; the kingdom of God as established here and now; the resurrection of the dead; and a final judgment in which there will be reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked.²³

[Http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/2007MultiEthnic.pdf](http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/2007MultiEthnic.pdf) (accessed 05 November 2010).

19. Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a “Peculiar People”* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 383.

20. *Ibid.*, 382.

21. *Ibid.*, 383.

22. For a history of the Church of God (Anderson) see, John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1980).

23. Church of God of North America, “Our History” (2010),

At the time of its establishment, the message of the church was the unity of all believers regardless of race or ethnicity. However, “no special point was made to the racial issue; the message was preached and black people responded and were accepted.”²⁴ The understanding of racial issues within the Church of God became much more complex during the 1890s. Some church leaders were advocating for full inclusion of blacks into churches and speaking out against racial prejudice.²⁵ White and black church members also held worship and business meetings together throughout the southern United States in violation of the segregation customs and laws.²⁶ However, the history of the church at the time also reveals more than a casual uneasiness about racial integration among some leaders and members. On 2 September 1897 the editor of the churches’ primary publication the *Gospel Trumpet* wrote:

We do not believe in white and colored people mixing together in marriage or in any other way that is unnecessary. We believe it would be better if it were convenient to have it so that they meet in separate meetings. But there are places where it is almost necessary for them to meet together, and they do in many places meet harmoniously and to the glory of God. I have been in meetings in both North and South, even in Augusta, Georgia, where both white and colored brethren met together in harmony and unity, God having swept away the prejudice from their hearts.... There is nothing wrong in them meeting separately where it can be done to the glory of God. Or on the other hand there is nothing wrong in them meeting together where it can be done to the glory of God.²⁷

Over the next two decades the Church of God gave into the social pressures toward segregated congregations. In 1912 it was reported that white leaders at the annual Camp Meeting “suggested to the blacks that they might find it more desirable if they found some

[Http://www.chog.org/AboutUs/OurHistory/tabid/67/Default.aspx](http://www.chog.org/AboutUs/OurHistory/tabid/67/Default.aspx) (accessed 05 November 2010).

24. John W. V. Smith, *Quest for Holiness and Unity*, 162.

25. *Ibid.*, 163–4.

26. *Ibid.*, 164–6.

27. Charles Ewing Brown, *When the Trumpet Sounded: A History of the Church of God Reformation Movement* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1951), 360–1.

other place to worship.”²⁸ The request resulted in a great sadness among the black members and led to a lasting change in interracial relations.²⁹ Ultimately the Church of God did not split into two denominations but the struggles resulted in segregated local churches and a unified national level; however, several black leaders formed their own ministerial association and a satellite national structure.³⁰

By the mid-1950s the General Ministerial Assembly was feeling pressure from black leaders for broader involvement in the larger church. As a result, the church created a commission to investigate and overcome the segregation problem found in the larger body.³¹ Over a five year period the commission made a series of recommendations and in 1961 the commission’s report closed with the following admonition: “This, therefore, is the time to take heart and practice the message we have taught.”³² The commission’s work continued to force the issue of integration at the national and local levels over the next several years. By 1968-69, the Church of God had provided seminars and workshops about racial integration and had taken action to integrate national boards.³³ The 1970s saw a continuation of the work that had taken place over the previous two decades and by 1971 the Executive Council of the Church of God elected Marcus H. Morgan as its first black chairperson.³⁴

28. John W. V. Smith, *Quest for Holiness and Unity*, 168.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 360–2.

32. Ibid., 362–3.

33. Ibid., 384–5.

34. Ibid., 404.

The current state of race relations in the Church of God is difficult to surmise due to a lack of information. Publications about the Church of God are limited and the official website does not provide official position papers or information about current committees. This is in large part due to the congregational nature of governance within the larger denomination. What is clear by looking at the denominational website and related literature is the amount of missionary work the denomination does on an international scale. Such a broad approach to evangelism hints at the church's attempt to maintain its historic roots on a quest for holiness and unity in bringing the message of Jesus to the world. However, it does not give any clear indication of the racial attitudes and practices of the people in the pews.

The purpose of outlining the histories of the Church of the Brethren and the Church of God (Anderson) with regard to race is to demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between Christianity and the maintenance of whiteness. What becomes clear in the histories of these two denominations is that when the church is not openly advocating for a change in the structures of society, its silence results in a de facto support of the status quo. In addition, when the church does advocate for social change it does so at great risk to institutional preservation. It is out of this understanding that Emerson and Smith use the language of “religion as a countervailing influence on racialization.”³⁵

The Construction of Countervailing Religio-Cultural Tools

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith argued that religion can be both a positive motivation used to help people correct an injustice that “violates their moral standards,” and it can also be the “ultimate legitimator of the status quo.”³⁶ Regardless of how religion motivates individuals to act, it provides a way for them to explain and justify the

35. Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 154.

36. *Ibid.*, 18.

current conditions in society. In the case of the racialization of the United States, white evangelical religion “accentuates group boundaries, divisions, categorizations, and the biases that follow.”³⁷ Emerson and Smith demonstrated throughout their book that in the case of white evangelicals, religion is a “countervailing influence” on the ongoing racialization of society.³⁸ In other words, white evangelicalism reinforces racism and white privilege by providing tools which counteract any good done by positive narratives. This happens regardless of the evangelical believers’ intentions, racial awareness, or efforts to change the racialization of society. White evangelicalism does this by providing a religious tools that perpetuate the white cultural understandings of the race problem in individualistic rather than structural ways.³⁹ According to Emerson and Smith’s structural study, white evangelicals believe that racism is the result of individual prejudice and/or bad relationships between whites and blacks.⁴⁰ The end result is that the religio-cultural tools of white evangelicals reinforce the racial attitudes and values that are a part of their white cultural tools.⁴¹

The research I conducted among a small group of ecumenical white Christians collaborates the arguments put forth in *Divided By Faith*. I found that there was a spectrum of awareness about racialization among the participants in my study. Unfortunately, my research, like that of Emerson and Smith, also found that the majority of participants used narratives from their religious tool kits in ways which helped to preserve the racial status quo. The use of such narratives does not mean that the user was

37. Ibid., 158.

38. Ibid., 154.

39. Ibid., 74.

40. Ibid., 75.

41. Ibid., 97.

being intentionally prejudiced or bigoted.⁴² Instead, it provides proof of the power of racialization to *create* communal cohesion and traditions by fostering a sense of normalcy, individualism, and identification with “everyman.” This is exactly what James Cone has argued in his claims that white Christians have never faced how being white impacts their religious beliefs, as I noted in Chapter One.⁴³ That is, what white Christians believe is shaped by the white communities in which they participate. Emerson and Smith’s study identifies a few of the narratives used by white evangelicals to explain the race problem in the United States.⁴⁴ My contribution to the conversation started by Emerson and Smith builds upon their work, almost a decade later, by identifying more specifically the narratives white Christians use from their religious and cultural tool kits to talk about the problem of race. I contend that when the narratives from both the religious and cultural tool kits are combined they create countervailing religio-cultural tool kit and narratives that are used to justify and maintain whiteness, racism, and white privilege.⁴⁵ I will now identify four of these countervailing religio-cultural tools.

42. I want to be clear that I do not believe that *all* the religious narratives created by white Christians are problematic or racist. Indeed, I know there are white churches and white Christians who have made positive contributions to the struggles for racial, gender, and queer justice; however, that is not a concern of this dissertation.

43. See James H. Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy,” in *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Marjorie Bowers-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003), 1–15, [Http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org/pcw/pdf/Cone_TheologyGreatSin.pdf](http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org/pcw/pdf/Cone_TheologyGreatSin.pdf), and, James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2005), 52–3. See also the discussion of Cone in Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 35–9.

44. See for example, the author’s discussion of the participants’ explanations of racial economic inequality. See, Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 98–106.

45. As noted above, this is not to say that positive religio-cultural tools for the breaking down or dismantling of racialization do not exist. It is that completely identifying these tools is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Just Deserts

The *religio-cultural tool of just deserts* is fostered by the narrative of status from the white cultural tool kit and the white Christian disconnect from social responsibility in general, and specifically develops from the belief that God rewards those who are faithful. In other words, those who enjoy good fortune have earned it through strong faith. Of course, what is not stated but is plainly implied is that those whose faith is weak “earn” misfortune. Put another way, the religio-cultural tool of just deserts holds that social realities are the result of personal problems or weaknesses caused by spiritual ineptitude or bankruptcy. This perspective perpetuates white privilege by allowing whites to believe their socio-political advantage is something they have earned, thereby excluding any analysis of systemic oppression. As we will see, these beliefs were most prevalent in interviewees’ narratives about the ‘American Dream.’

For some readers, this religio-cultural tool of just deserts may sound familiar. It aligns, in part, with Max Weber’s theory of “the spirit of capitalism” and what has become more popularly known as the Protestant work ethic. Weber argued that a contributing factor to the U.S. economy becoming a capitalist system was a Protestant ethic rooted in Puritan, Lutheran, and Calvinist theologies. According to Weber:

The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means of asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of ... the spirit of capitalism.⁴⁶

One example is the Calvinist tenet of predestination, which holds that God has already determined who is saved. This belief engendered in Calvinists a psychological need to know if they were indeed saved. As a consequence, they started to look at their financial

46. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Second, trans. Talcott Parsons, introd. by Randall Collins (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1998), 172.

success as a mark of God's favor.⁴⁷ It may also sound familiar because the religio-cultural tool of just deserts contains "prosperity theology," which is an interdenominational belief that it is God's will that believers be financially prosperous.⁴⁸ In other words, God blesses those who are faithful. While the comparisons above illustrate the materials aspects of a religio-cultural tool of just deserts, I will extend this tool to the general belief that individuals, groups, communities, and populations are given what they deserve: those who are not blessed have done or are doing something which offends God. Popular televangelist Pat Robertson has called this the "law of reciprocity,"⁴⁹ which addresses more than finances. According to Robertson:

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Smile at another person, and he'll probably smile back at you. Be critical of others, and they'll respond in kind. As you give, you will receive. Give generously, and you'll receive in like measure.

Since God owns everything—"the cattle on a thousand hills" and all there is—it might seem that He doesn't really need our tithes and offerings. He doesn't need them, true, but we need to give them. For, in instructing us to tithe, God is helping us to understand the law of reciprocity.

47. See, Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, especially 35-46 and 98-127.

48. Prosperity theology, or the "prosperity gospel," originated with Oral Roberts in 1954 and gained popularity with the so-called "Faith Movement" started by Keith Hagin in the mid-1970s. For an excellent history of prosperity theology see, Bradley A. Koch, "The Prosperity Gospel and Economic Prosperity: Race, Class, Giving, and Voting," Ph.D. diss. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2009), 4-10, [Http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/Lakefamilyinstitute/docs/Brad_Koch_Final_Dissertation%208-5-09.pdf](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/Lakefamilyinstitute/docs/Brad_Koch_Final_Dissertation%208-5-09.pdf) (accessed 15 March 2010).

49. Pat Robertson, "Giving and Tithing," *CBN.Com*, [Http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/cbnteachingsheets/giving_and_tithing.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/cbnteachingsheets/giving_and_tithing.aspx) (accessed 18 March 2010) I have strong objections to Robertson's use of the term "reciprocity." I understand "reciprocity" to mean a relationship of mutual dependence. For example, bees need the nectar of flowering plants to create honey and flowering plants need bees to help in the pollination process. If flowering plants stop producing nectar the bees will stop the pollination process and vice versa. Robertson is using the "law of reciprocity" to mean that there is an exchange between two parties; in other words, an action taken by person A results in a response by person B but neither mutuality nor interdependence are inherent to the relationship.

In addition, failure to tithe means we are actually robbing God of what is due Him.⁵⁰

As Robertson addresses tithing he takes the argument beyond the financial to a “law” or ethic of actions. For Robertson people must be in a relationship with God that pleases Him[sic] in order to receive His[sic] favor. I found expressions of this tool in some form by twenty-five percent of my interviewees. Ralph Meyers made the following statement:

If one is not in regular attendance at a church of some kind, Christian church, I do not think you can call yourself Christian. People say that you do not have to go to church, but I am not going to take any chances. I think it is necessary. You never know what God will do if you don't go to church.

It is the type of thinking revealed in Meyers' last sentence that sustains and reinforces whiteness and white privilege, because it allows whites to blame the victims of oppression and racism by declaring the victims' lack of faith or incorrect faith as the reason for their situation.

This perspective has been the subject of questions and discussions within black Christian churches and communities for many years.⁵¹ William Jones even went public with the question, “Is God a white racist?” in his book with the same title. Jones argues that given the history of blacks and whites in the United States, some kind of “divine racism” in which God favors whites surely must apply.⁵²

In my own research, I observed the religio-cultural tool of just deserts being used in two different ways. First, it provided a way to explain the unfortunate and unexpected turns in the life of individuals and communities. The following comments by Brian

50. Robertson, “Giving and Tithing.”

51. See for example, Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998); Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*; and, Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology Past, Present and Future* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

52. See, William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 3–23.

Hendricks are representative: “Dude, my brother-in-law has been out of work for a long time and had all kinds of shit happening to him. How much does God hate him, ya know? He’s not doing himself any favors though: he is one of the laziest black people I know.” Hendricks, who like all the other interviewees is white, is not only using the tool kit of just deserts to explain his black brother-in-law’s life circumstances, he is also connecting those life circumstances to race. Hendricks believes that not only has his brother-in-law faced a series of hardships brought about by God, but also believes his brother-in-law is just a “lazy black man” (a premier example of stereotype) and therefore deserving of the misfortune. The tool of just deserts as a way to explain the unfortunate and unexpected turns in the life of individuals can also be found in comments made by certain high profile evangelicals who proclaimed Hurricane Katrina to be a sign of God’s wrath.⁵³ Franklin Graham was quoted as saying:

[New Orleans] is one wicked city, OK? It’s known for Mardi Gras, for Satan worship. It’s known for sex perversion. It’s known for every type of drugs and alcohol and the orgies and all of these things that go on down there in New Orleans. There’s been a black spiritual cloud over New Orleans for years.⁵⁴

Graham’s father, Billy Graham, was not as sure about why God had allowed Katrina to occur, but offered that, “God has allowed it, and there is a purpose that we won’t know

53. Some evangelical leaders cited abortions as well as celebrations by the New Orleans queer community as two reasons God allowed Katrina and the flooding to take place. See, Terry Gross, “Pastor John Hagee on Christian Zionism,” *NPR.Org*, 18 September 2006, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6097362> (accessed 18 March 2010); and, Media Matters, “Religious Conservatives Claim Katrina Was God’s Omen, Punishment for the United States,” *MediaMatters.Org*, 13 September 2005, <http://mediamatters.org/research/200509130004> (accessed 18 March 2010). Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell made similar claims about the reasons for the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. See, Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 106.

54. MSNBC.com, “Hurricane Katrina: Wrath of God?” *MSNBC.Com*, 5 October 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9600878/> (accessed 18 March 2010).

maybe for years to come.”⁵⁵ For those who use the religio-cultural tool of just deserts, God is in control of the ebbs and flows of reality, constantly and consistently meting out justice and retribution to individuals and communities.

Those enjoying socio-political advantages also use this tool to legitimize their place in society as the natural result of self-motivation and determination. The de facto implication of such a claim is that those who are poor and dispossessed are *not* self-motivated or determined enough. As I explained in the previous chapter, there is a disconnect in the minds of many white Christians between being a good person and being socially responsible. Recall that whites see themselves as individuals and therefore do not believe they contribute to or benefit from something called systemic racism. In addition, the narrative of status functions in those stories told by whites that situate their own social location relative to the location of so-called “minority groups” with a resentful awareness of the social, political, and economic gains made by non-whites. Within my research, the religio-cultural tool of just deserts included the interviewees’ narratives about ‘the American Dream.’

The idea of the “American Dream” has its roots in the hopes, dreams, theologies, and philosophies of the Puritans and later in such Enlightenment thinkers as John Winthrop, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson.⁵⁶ The naming of the American Dream came in 1931 in the writings of James Truslow Adams, who wrote:

[The] American Dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream, or hope, has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of

55. Jon Meacham, “God, Satan, and Katrina: Billy Graham on the Storm, the Mystery of Evil, and a Regret From His Long Ministry,” *Newsweek*, 20 March 2006, [Http://www2.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/03-12-2006/0004318292&EDATE=](http://www2.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/03-12-2006/0004318292&EDATE=) (accessed 18 March 2010).

56. For a concise overview of the history of the American Dream see, Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it.⁵⁷

It is important to keep in mind that Adams, like many other U.S. colonizers, was speaking during a time in history and with a socio-political context that did not include non-whites when using terms like “we” or “our.” This is important because the idea of the “American Dream” did not develop consistently across racial and/or ethnic lines. The “American Dream” for populations such as blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, as, and the various immigrant populations will likely be differently understood, and definitely will differ from that of whites. For the majority of whites in the U.S. the “American Dream” means that in America everyone has personal liberties and as a result anyone can be successful if he or she works hard enough. For the majority of non-whites this version of the “American Dream” is complicated by the socio-political restraints and outright discrimination placed on them by U.S. policies and the legal system.⁵⁸ Furthermore, being successful in this country is invariably a sort of short-hand for being *financially* successful, and typically includes one or more of the following: a good job, a healthy marriage, a comfortable house, and smart and attractive children. Ninety percent of my interviewees thought of the “American Dream” as inherently good, and were unable to see any negative consequences it might have on people taking action to help those in need.⁵⁹ A representative example is a statement made by Sara Butterfield:

57. James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (1931) quoted in Cullen, *The American Dream*, 4. I was unable to locate Adams’ work as a primary resource.

58. For an understanding of how the legal system has been constructed to protect whiteness see, Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); and, Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

59. Wyndy Corbin found similar results in her work with Evangelicals. See, Wyndy Corbin, “The Impact of the American Dream on Evangelical Ethics,” *CrossCurrents* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 344.

I would say for most people the American Dream would be living in a secure country where you feel financially secure and physically secure because we have good laws and freedom of speech and freedom of religion. I believe that's the American Dream. Just those things and I think everyone can achieve that.

Additionally, not only did fifty-seven percent of the interviewees who used the narrative of status believe that the "American Dream" was possible, they connected it to God's blessing; people getting what they deserve. Recall Caddie Collins statements which reflect the narrative of status, "I don't know. 'Cause I almost think it's the other way around. I almost think that some of my brothers of color have been benefiting by their color." Collins believes that non-whites have benefited socially and economically from their racialized status due to affirmative action. Later in the same interview when asked about the "American Dream," she told this story:

*My family was faithful and God blessed them for it. My mother, her family is Scottish so they came through Ellis Island... My father's family is Newfoundlanders, so it meant a lot to them to be able to work and provide. [Where they lived was] just the melting pot of all the ethnic groups, but they understood things, as far as hard work. And even their faith, you know, I think about that. Such respect among their faiths. They might have been separate. You might have had your Italians over here and strong Irish community here, and the Scots, my goodness, just right here. But they were here for the American Dream. And what was the dream? The dream was that they could work and they could live and they could have something *if they were faithful*. So, God first and your family and your neighbor and good friends, and that's the American Dream.... You know, despite the frailties of all of our human nature, I do believe the Lord is still there. And there are people that are still looking at Him, and they are still getting their directives and they are still wanting to honor Him, and they are still wanting to love their neighbor as their self and He rewards them. And so, I think yeah, that's what the American dream is. And it still is, even though we may be being told otherwise, it's there. It's there in our roots, it's there in my neighbors, you know? And I'm very thankful. I'm thankful. My parents and their parents came for that American Dream. *They were blessed by God* and they lived it.*

Collins and the other interviewees who utilized the religio-cultural tool of just deserts clearly connected it with the American Dream. Some white Christians believe that whites deserve the advantages they enjoy because they have been more faithful. Such a belief supports white privilege by ignoring the institutions and systems and placing blame on individuals for creating their own problems by not being faithful to God.

Absence

The *religio-cultural tool of absence* is characterized by a near total absence of any discussion about racial oppression within a congregation. If racial oppression is discussed, it is likely with the implicit understanding that it is not a problem in *this* congregation but *other* congregations do experience it. This tool supports the misconception that because there are no non-whites in the community, racism and white privilege do not exist there. It is a tool used not only by congregations in predominantly white or all-white rural communities, but also by predominantly white or all-white congregations located in urban areas that include diverse racial populations. While this tool draws from the narrative of color-isolation, it is also contains what bell hooks has called “bourgeois values,” that is, white middle-class values and attitudes.⁶⁰

As discussed in Chapter Three, whites are color-isolated if, intentionally or not, they have no ongoing relationships or interaction with non-whites. In many communities the phenomenon of color-isolation is a result of racialized socio-political practices of the past which created de facto segregation; that is, racially established communal boundaries not associated with any official policies.⁶¹ The religio-cultural tool of absence also utilizes the narrative of color-isolation which provides excuses for why racism and racial oppression are not discussed in congregations. Eighty percent of those I interviewed said their congregation did not talk about racism, and ten of the sixteen offered that the absence of non-whites was the reason. Jim Peters had this to say:

My previous church acknowledged prejudiced treatment of blacks when [the topic] was raised but we never had to talk about it because we were all white. My current congregation rarely talks about it.

60. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education As the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 178.

61. Amanda E. Lewis, “Some Are More Equal Than Others: Lessons of Whiteness From School,” in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 164.

Peters' comments are representative of those interviewees who used the narrative of isolation as a reason for not addressing racism. Others used words such as "lily-white" and "vanilla" to describe their all-white congregations and communities. Racism was not a high priority for the interviewees because no one was there to make it a part of the conversation. Put another way, whites do not talk about racism because racism is not a *white* problem. Ralph Meyers phrased it as a question: "How can somebody be racist if there are no blacks [in the community]?" What was overlooked by Peters, Meyers, and the others was that the reason there were no blacks in their churches or communities was largely due to the routine, intentional segregation that has characterized this country for a century and a half. The church has by no means been immune to or above condoning de facto segregation. To even the casual observer the statement that, "Eleven o'clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America"⁶² still holds true in the greater Fort Wayne area⁶³ and is possibly accurate for much of the U.S.

The religio-cultural tool of absence consists of a system of bourgeois values, protocols, and white-upper-middle-class talk; congregations remain white due to the "evocation of materially privileged class experience (usually that of the middle class) as a

62. The exact origins of this quote are unknown. Martin Luther King, Jr. used it on "Meet the Press" in 1960. See Martin Luther King, "17 April 1960 Interview on 'Meet the Press,'" in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, vol. V, Martin Luther King, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 434. Billy Graham has also been credited with the statement. See Edward Gilbreath, "The Apostle Paul and His Times: History in the Making - Billy Graham Had a Dream," *Christian History & Biography*, no. 47 (1 July 1995), <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1995/issue47/4744.html>.

63. Michael Emerson and Rodney Woo have argued that only seven percent of congregations in the United States are "multi-racial" meaning they have members from two or more racial groups with the most numerous group not making up more than 80% of the congregation. See, Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

universal norm.”⁶⁴ Non-whites are keenly aware that a normative white culture constituted by specific white cultural spaces and particular protocols dominates American society, and one such cultural space is white congregations.⁶⁵ This white space and culture has been crafted and adapted for more than five hundred years by whites, and now is the cultural norm. Such an environment in a church perpetuates white privilege not only by dictating *which* subjects are or are not open to discussion, but also *how* certain subjects can and will be discussed. For example, white congregational members may accept the premise that not everyone in the congregation is from the same social class, and yet nonetheless expect that the congregation will operate with middle-to-upper-class white norms, such as the use of standard English by pastors during sermons.⁶⁶ It is these commonly understood, but often unspoken, norms that set cultural boundaries.⁶⁷ Don Clark made the following comments about the worship-style and preaching at his upper-middle class congregation: “I think someone would need to have a college degree to understand the preaching. [Our pastors] use a lot of illustrations and examples from literature in their sermons.” Clark added that his congregation was concerned about issues of social justice, but that he was not sure “rich people can have [a commitment to social justice].” During his interview, Clark clearly expressed concerns about his congregation’s abilities to be more diverse due to its whiteness and class status.

64. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 181.

65. James W. Perkinson, *Shamanism, Racism, and Hip Hop Culture: Essays on White Supremacy and Black Subversion*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas, *Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 181. Perkinson not only addresses the creation of normative white spaces, he also addresses the moral implications of physically embodying whiteness.

66. bell hooks made similar observations about academic course settings on predominantly white college campuses. See her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, 177-190.

67. Katherine Turpin, “The Cultures of Social Class and Religious Educational Practice,” *Religious Education* 104, no. 3 (May 2009): 318.

Another way white cultural protocols and values are used in congregations is to create social boundaries through the ways people talk, the mannerisms they use, and the way they dress.⁶⁸ Speaking about the economic and racial make-up of his congregation Parker Wallis stated:

Churches have walled themselves up to those who need the church the most. For example, you see a lot of well dressed white people who have attended that church for a long time. Where are the people in rags? Where are the blacks and Hispanics? Why are they uncomfortable in the church?

One response to Wallis' questions is that congregations are not as welcoming and friendly as they perceive themselves to be. It is the creation of white spaces through protocols, along with the omission of any talk about race and racism, that create the religio-cultural tool.

Guilt

Some whites are aware of how whiteness and racism inform their communities or their understandings of God and, as a result, some white Christians use a *religio-cultural tool of guilt*. Individuals make use of this tool when they feel they are not doing enough to meet God's call to make the world a better place.⁶⁹ If a person believes that good Christians should work for the common good, then he or she must contribute to projects that assist others. Yet, that person can feel guilty when she or he sees little result from the time and energy invested. I am concerned here with what is often referred to as

68. Ibid., 320–1.

69. I am using the term “guilt” rather than “shame” with great intentionality. It is my understanding that guilt is the regret a person feels based on her or his *action* or *inaction* in a given situation. Guilt can be overcome with restitution. Shame, however, is derived from who a person understands himself or herself to be. According to Thandeka, “Nothing can be done because shame results not from something one did wrong but rather from something wrong with oneself” [13]. For a more detailed discussion of guilt versus shame see, Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (New York: Continuum, 2002), especially 12-13.

paralyzing guilt. The religio-cultural tool of guilt helps to maintain white privilege insofar as whites feel guilty for not having an effect on the systems of racism, and as a result either choose not to engage in some situations or give up altogether on trying to create change. In other words, some whites feel so overwhelmed by the amount of socio-political change that must occur in order to achieve racial equality that no matter how much anti-racism work they do it never feels like enough and they eventually give up or choose not to act.⁷⁰ The tool of guilt builds on the narrative of “living a Christ-like life,” as well as the whiteness narrative of good intentions.

The narrative of “living a Christ-like life” places the focus on putting into practice Jesus’ teachings about love and care for the persecuted, oppressed, and poor of society. Power blindness is perpetuated by the narrative of “living a Christ-like life” when its adherents claim that because they have “another way of living” they are not responsible for the social ills of society. However, the religio-cultural tool of guilt is more likely to be found among those who adhere to “living a Christ-like life” and recognize that they do benefit from the racial status quo. Lucas Allen was one of the twenty percent of interviewees who struggled with a tool of guilt. When I asked him what it means to be a Christian he stated, “One who believes in and attempts to follow the teaching of Jesus, which is a very difficult thing to do.” I later asked him about white privilege and he responded, “As white people we have a benefit at the expense of people who are not white.” I also asked him how he knew if someone was racist, and he responded as follows:

There is always the obvious things in language and behavior like racial slurs et cetera, but things have gotten more subtle. Being someone who benefits from white privilege I have to make a conscious effort to be more alert. It’s easy to let things go by because they are not impacting me directly... It’s difficult not to just

70. Allan Johnson has addressed a similar phenomenon he calls “the myth of no effect,” which is belief of people with socio-political power that no matter what they do nothing will change the systems of power [131]. For Johnson, this myth is used by some people with power as an excuse to do nothing so they do not have to take responsibility for the power they do hold [133]. See, Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, Second ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 131–7.

give up, especially if you are the only one who always raises the issue, but I also struggle when I do not say something.

Allen was more aware of the problems of white privilege and racism than most of my interviewees, but still struggled with confronting racism and felt guilty for not being more active. I also found evidence of the religio-cultural tool of guilt in the life narratives of three other interviewees who favored the narrative of good intentions. Recall the narrative of good intentions: those stories told by the interviewees about times when they have attempted to help the oppressed or others in need but with no genuine concern for a positive outcome. Lynn Jennings spoke in this way:

We do what we can [with regard to confronting racism and sexism]. But I am not sure I always know because some things are so subtle. And some things we are so used to they are racist or sexist, but I am so used to it doesn't stand out.... It's more of the undertones we do not catch. Twenty minutes later you are retelling a story or a joke to someone else and you think, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh! I cannot believe I just said that!" You just feel so bad or you just don't get it at all. But we do what we can. *Sometimes I think life would be easier if we just gave up.*

Sara M. Butterfield made similar comments:

Racism and sexism are so overwhelming and I always hope that I do the right thing. I think it's difficult for me. Sometimes you can tell [when someone is being racist]. For example sometimes the words people use when they make a joke. Or they say something in a certain tone and you know right off. Then sometimes it's more subtle than that.... I'm not person of color so I don't feel those innuendos when that happens. But you have to engage it when it's more straight out. For example [Don] Imus⁷¹ but there are tons and tons of little innuendos that happen every day. I just do the best I can and trust in God.

71. On 04 April 2007 Don Imus, a white radio talk show host, referred to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy-headed ho's." As a result, Imus was suspended and eventually fired by CBS and NBC. See, Bill Carter, "Radio Host Is Suspended Over Racial Remarks," *New York Times*, 10 April 2007, [Http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/10/business/media/10imus.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/10/business/media/10imus.html) (accessed 18 March 2010); Judy Faber, "CBS Fires Don Imus Over Racial Slur," *CBS News*, 12 April 2007, [Http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/04/12/national/main2675273.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/04/12/national/main2675273.shtml) (accessed 18 March 2010); and, Bill Carter, "NBC News Drops Imus Show Over Racial Remark," *New York Times*, 12 April 2007, [Http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/business/media/12dismiss.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/business/media/12dismiss.html) (accessed 18 March 2010).

Both Jennings and Butterfield, like other anti-racist whites, rely heavily on the narrative of good intentions, and yet on occasion they also feel guilty about not getting it right. Additionally, Allen, Jennings, and Butterfield all indicated a sense of being overwhelmed by the amount of work that needed to be done to bring about lasting social change and they each admitted that there were times in their lives when they made the choice not to act.

Tolerance

The *religio-cultural tool of tolerance* was found among self-proclaimed progressive Christian individuals and congregations who have adopted a social justice perspective that includes so-called “radical” inclusivity and openness to all people regardless of race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or class, but in reality continue to function in ways that reflect the dominant socio-political structures of the larger society. I use the term “tolerance” in this section intentionally, and means to imply a critique. In the context of multiculturalism ‘tolerance’ means to put up with cultural, political, and social differences. According to Diana Eck, “[Tolerance] does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence.”⁷² While the concept of tolerance may help reduce tension and violence in some instances, it does nothing to create real and lasting change. Consequently, a religio-cultural tool of tolerance helps to sustain white privilege by allowing people to believe they are doing good while at the same time allowing them to maintain their socio-political advantage. Like the tool of guilt, a tool of tolerance is also fostered by both the white Christian narrative of “living a Christ-like” life and the cultural narrative of good intentions.

72. Diana L. Eck, “What is Pluralism?” (The Pluralism Project), [Http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/what_is_pluralism](http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/what_is_pluralism) (accessed 18 March 2010).

As I discussed above, people professing the narrative of “living a Christ-like life” try to incorporate into their lives ethical practices that they perceive to be consistent with Jesus’ teachings of love and justice. For twenty-five percent of the interviewees their narrative of “living a Christ-like life” included speaking out against racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and classism, as well as being inviting to all people regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The problem of white privilege persists when nothing really changes in the congregation beyond a pronouncement claiming they are all-inclusive. Indeed, the reality too often is that claiming to be open to diversity is going far enough. It is at this point that the white cultural narrative of good intentions also starts to serve as an excuse for the way things are in a congregation. As introduced in the preceding section, the narrative of good intentions came from white cultural tool kits and were those stories told by the interviewees about the times when they “tried to do the right thing.” For instance, Jim Peters stated, “My congregation is welcoming to everyone and has a statement of inclusion that it prints in all congregational materials. But if you look around we are still a white, middle-to-upper class, predominantly heterosexual community.” Other interviewees had similar stories but three added that not only was there little diversity in their congregations there was little change in stereotypical gender roles. They reported that the senior pastor, board chair, ushers, and steward committee members were all males, while their church board secretaries and treasurers, office assistants, and educational commission members were all females. The point here is that even congregations with the best of intentions to create an inclusive environment end up with an environment of tolerance rather than enlivened practice. White privilege becomes likely when the claims of inclusion are not supported by actions, such as institutional structural change or movement toward pluralism, an active engagement with diversity.⁷³

73. For detailed understanding of pluralism see, Diana L. Eck, “From Diversity to Pluralism” (The Pluralism Project, 2006), [Http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/whhttp://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/essays/from_di](http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/whhttp://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/essays/from_di)

Conclusions and Next Steps

The goal of this dissertation has been to investigate how white Christians keep systems of oppression, especially racism, in place through their religious and cultural tools. In this chapter I have identified five religio-cultural tools used among the twenty interviewees from my study conducted in greater Fort Wayne, Indiana. As I analyzed the life narratives of the interviewees one thing became very clear in naming these religio-cultural tools: white Christians who want to create a more just and equal society must be ready to confront and then combat the guilt, ambivalence, misinformation, fear, and resentment about racism that white religious and cultural tool kits and their narratives have helped to foster over the past five-hundred years. While the twenty participants do not represent a statistically representative research population, my findings are consistent with those of Emerson and Smith, and indicate there is a connection between white privilege and white religio-cultural tool kits. This connection is fostered by three distinct phenomena which have been addressed throughout this dissertation: the normalization of whiteness and the white individual, the notion of color-blindness, and the white disconnect from social responsibility.

The first phenomenon that fosters a connection among whiteness, racism, white privilege and white religio-cultural tools is the normalization of whiteness and the white notion of the individual. As I established in Chapter One, whites under the guise of religious and scientific justifications of white privilege have intentionally worked since European expansionism to create and maintain socio-political systems that benefit and normalize whiteness. These socio-political systems have not only normalized whiteness they have also made it invisible by creating the *Other* and placing the burden of difference on them. Put differently, as whites have served as the definers of the socio-political norm, whiteness has become invisible to whites. This invisibility allows whites to identify

iversity_to_pluralism (accessed 18 March 2010).

themselves as autonomous individuals rather than as members of any racialized community. Since most whites do not often have to think about being white, they are unaware of the socio-political privileges afforded them. Instead, many whites believe in the false ideas that privilege is something a person achieves and that life circumstances are something that a person can change with hard work and faith. The reason such notions are false is because, as I established in Chapter Three, privilege and social status are given to a person based on the dominant groups with which he or she can be identified in terms of race, gender, physical abilities, and sexual identity. Moreover, when a person can be identified with a subordinate group she or he loses status and, as a result, will find it more difficult, if not impossible, to change her or his life circumstances due to the social, legal, and political systems historically put into place to protect whites. The consequences of all this, the invisibility of whiteness and the understandings of being an individual, is detachment by most whites from the realities of systemic oppression. According to Francis Kendall, “We [whites] anesthetize ourselves and dissociate, feeling as though we detach from both ourselves and the situation that we find unbearable.”⁷⁴ It is these moments of detachment which promote a connection between white privilege and white religio-cultural tool kits by allowing whites to ignore how being white impacts their understanding of God and ultimately how they choose to engage their neighbors.

The second phenomenon which furthers white privilege and racism as a part of white religious and cultural tool kits is the notion of color-blindness. Many whites want to believe that the problem of racism ended after the Civil Rights movement because overt

74. Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series (New York: Routledge, 2006), 34. Ward Churchill has called this “willful and deliberate ignorance.” See Ward Churchill, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of US Imperial Arrogance and Criminality* (Oakland: AK Press, 2002), 6–7. See also, Mab Segrest, “The Souls of White Folks,” in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 50.

bigotry and hatred have become publicly unacceptable. As discussed in Chapter Three, it is politically correct to be “color-blind,” that is, not seeing another person’s race. Many whites believe a person achieves color-blindness by not openly discriminating against non-whites and by avoiding the use of overt racist terms. If a person is determined to be a racist he or she is also deemed to be ignorant. Thus, racism becomes about the ignorance of a few white people and not about socio-political systems which afford advantages to whites. There are two major consequences to this type of thinking about racism: First, whites are able to dismiss the idea that systemic oppression exists because racism was eliminated during the Civil Rights movement. Second, whites come to believe that since there is an absence of overt racism, racism does not exist, ignoring the subtle forms of racism I discussed in Chapter Three. The notion of color-blindness supports white privilege and white religio-cultural tool kit by allowing whites to believe that they are not racist because they do not use overt racist language. As a result whites do not acknowledge how their religious beliefs or their congregations perpetuate whiteness and white privilege.

The white disconnect between what it means to be a good person and being socially responsible for the structures that exist is the third phenomenon that nurtures the connection between white privilege and white religio-cultural tools. As discussed in Chapter Three, the disconnect ignores white Christians shared responsibility for the common good. Said differently, some white Christians, like many whites in general, are only concerned about what it means for them as individuals to be good, and are oblivious to many of the socio-political systems which do not affect them directly. This disconnect is dependent on the white concept of the autonomous individual because it allows whites to remain centered on themselves. It also depends on the Christian religious understandings of a personal belief-based salvation. When taken together both self-centeredness and a concern for personal salvation allows whites to ignore their

contributions to the oppressive socio-political systems and yet feel good about who they are as Christians.

The religio-cultural tools of whiteness have been constructed over time and are currently constructed in large part by the invisibility of whiteness, the white concept of the autonomous individual, the notion of color-blindness, and the white disconnect from social responsibility. There is a clear relationship between white religious beliefs and race, class, gender, language and culture. The way a person thinks, the values a person holds, and subsequently the way a person acts are all shaped by their cultural tool kits and narratives, as well as by local and communal narratives passed down through history, traditions, and relationships. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, what it means to be white in the contemporary United States is shaped by past religious and cultural tool kits and narratives that are interpreted and then acted upon. It is my hope that by identifying, exposing the characteristics of whiteness, and naming the religio-cultural tools of white Christians we can open up a space for alternative tool kits and narratives.

Finally, although it goes slightly beyond the purview of this dissertation, I find it necessary to conclude by offering a few suggestions for practices that individuals and congregations might engage in order to move forward. Two questions come to mind: First, what can we (white Christian individuals and communities) do to cultivate change? Second, how can we be intentional about creating alternative religio-cultural tools and narratives? The answers to these questions are complex and multi-faceted. The complexity is due at least in part to the construction of privilege in U.S. society. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, privilege is something bestowed upon individuals by society based on outward appearances. In other words, I am concerned with the privileges created by unearned advantages or unearned entitlements. The paradox created by this understanding of privilege⁷⁵ allows many whites to believe they have no privilege

75. Allan Johnson has written extensively about privilege as paradox. See, Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference*, 34–9.

or social advantage. However, if a person is white, heterosexual, male, and/or middle-to-upper-class, he or she always maintains some degree of privilege. Due to the multiple privileges operating in U.S. society, a person trying to cultivate a more equal and just society must be aware of, as well as simultaneously address, all types of privilege. The point is for individuals to become aware of the privileges they have due to unearned advantage, and to make a choice about whether to they want to hold on to it or to challenge it. There are several practices that individuals and congregations can take to start addressing the privileges they maintain and the ways in which they contribute to systems of oppression. Let us now consider nine practices by which individuals can become more critical and anti-oppression oriented: First, a person can become more self-aware of the power and privileges she or he maintains as a member of the white-ruled community and society. Two of the books I have found most helpful in raising awareness about privilege, especially white privilege are: Allan Johnson's, *Privilege, Power and Difference*, and Francis Kendall's, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*.⁷⁶ In addition, I have found that the Project Implicit website, a research project housed at Harvard University, allows individuals to measure their conscious and unconscious biases on a variety of topics, such as race, skin-tone, gender, and sexuality. Individuals participating in the Project Implicit on-line "implicit association tests" should remember that the results are not absolute, but do allow individuals to gain an initial understanding of their socio-political biases.⁷⁷ In order to

76. See, Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference*; and, Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege*. See also, Bob Pease, *Undoing Privilege: Unearned Advantage in a Divided World* (London: Zed Books, 2010); and, Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*, Revised and Updated (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009).

77. See, Project Implicit, "Implicit Association Test" (AIT Corporation and Harvard University, 2010), <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/> (accessed 20 June 2010).

process all of these new realizations about oneself it is also very important that a person develop a support group and connect with like-minded people.

Second individuals can learn the histories of Europe and the United States as told by the people who have been victimized by the systems of white privilege. Recall from Chapter Three that most whites do not think racism is their issue because they have no understanding of how whiteness and racism have been interconnected throughout the last five hundred years of so-called European and U.S. colonial “advancement.” The history most whites learn in primary school reveals only a very small fraction of the truth, if any, about the European and U.S. conquests.⁷⁸ The only way for a person to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the United States is to intentionally seek alternative texts such as, Ronald Takaki’s, *A Different Mirror*, Vincent Harding’s, *There is a River*, Anne McClintock’s, *Imperial Leather*, and, Howard Zinn’s, *A People’s History of the United States*, George Tinker’s, *Missionary Conquest*, each of which give a significantly different understanding of how the United States has come to be the country it is today.⁷⁹

Third, individuals can learn their families’ histories. A person seeking to better understand the history of his or her family will likely discover two ideas of vital importance for creating social change. First, he or she will have a context for the roots of

78. For an understanding of the biases of U.S. history taught in high school history texts see, James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1995). See also, Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege*, 11–2.

79. See, Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993); Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2003); and, George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

racism and other types of oppression in his or her own family. Such a discovery will force him or her to confront the racism in his or her own life. Second, as I have learned from Vincent and Rachel Harding, knowing one's family history allows a person to find a family role model for social change. This is because in every family there is at least one person who has stood against oppression and/or for a just cause. A person who knows her or his family's history will better be able to be an anti-oppression ally by choosing a different path from some in their families while maintaining the positive family role models.

Fourth, white allies can allow themselves to remember and lament the histories they have inherited. Lament involves both grieving what has been lost as well as being angry. Too often white Christians, especially those of a progressive mindset, have been told that being angry is a sin.⁸⁰ George McClain argues that Christians should reclaim the tradition of reciting the Psalms due to their cathartic nature. For example, Psalm 102 contain a great deal of anger.⁸¹ A person who honestly embraces the lament and anger can use it as a catalyst for social change.

The fifth practice for becoming an effective anti-oppression advocate is not becoming complacent due to the guilt of being white. When a person feels overwhelmed by white guilt it can be paralyzing. However, like anger, guilt can be a catalyst for change. Consider the examples of Confessing Church leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer and journalist and civil rights activist Anne Braden. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pacifist pastor theologian, was a part of the Christian resistance movement against Adolf Hitler during World War II. He eventually decided to become a member of a group which attempted to assassinate Hitler,

80. One example of anger as sin can be found in Ephesians 4 which implies that it is permissible to be angry but not to stay angry. The idea for this fourth practice was inspired by Rev. Melissa Bennett's 27 June 2010 sermon, "Lament and Love," Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Fort Wayne, IN.

81. George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God: Prayer, Discernment, and Ritual for Social Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 58–64.

and he became very dependent on grace to alleviate his guilt.⁸² Just a few years after Bonhoeffer's death, Anne Braden felt called to become more involved in the Civil Rights movement. Braden was an active racial justice advocate for more than fifty years. Remarkably, in 1954 she and her spouse Carl Braden went as far as buying a house in an all-white neighborhood and illegally selling it to a black family in order to integrate the neighborhood.⁸³ Both Bonhoeffer and Braden chose to move past their guilt and act on faith.

Sixth, whites can learn how to listen. As I argued in Chapters Three and Four whites often become paternalistic, ignoring the needs and wishes of the non-white, women, and/or queer communities with which they are trying to ally themselves. In addition, many of the whites who show contempt or resentment toward so-called "minorities" do so in part because they feel they are losing control. One way to defuse and manage conflicts to make people feel they are being heard. A person who feels heard is more likely to listen, and therefore creates a much better chance for change.

The seventh practice whites can begin is to become engaged in issues of oppression, making the issues real in white communities. Recall from Chapter Three that many of the interviewees claimed racism was not an issue for them because they grew up in communities that were almost exclusively white. Regardless of where a person lives, she or he must be the one to continually raise concerns about the oppression taking place locally and globally. The only way communities can change their attitudes and practices is by becoming aware of the issues.

82. See, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Robert Coles, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Simon and Schuster, 1997); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

83. See, Vincent Harding, et al., *Anne Braden Racial Justice Organizer*, Veterans of Hope Pamphlet Series no. 2 (Denver: Veterans of Hope Project, 2004).

Eighth, white allies can be confrontational in naming and challenging the religious and cultural narratives of whiteness they observe around them. It is my hope that this dissertation will provide names for some of the white privilege and oppressive phenomena taking place around and in white communities. It is only when something is given a name that it can be confronted and changed.

The ninth practice individuals can start working on is to explain and justify their anti-oppression and anti-privilege positions using religious language to express themselves. In order to change the religio-cultural tools of the status quo a person must be able to explain why those beliefs are oppressive as well as be able to provide ideas for a new more Christ-like set of beliefs. These new beliefs, like all religious beliefs, must be constructed by local communities adapting to the particularities of the community.

In addition to the nine practices individuals can engage, there are at least five practices that can be implemented by congregations. First, congregations can start practicing radical inclusion, which means continually reviewing the practices and policies of the congregation to be sure they are not excluding anyone from congregational life. Such a practice means that congregations are never completely settled in their ways or comfortable to the point of complacency. It also means that congregations are always asking questions about who is present and absent from the community.

Second, congregations can develop real and lasting relationships with local communities that face oppression. Too often white congregations participate in short-term or one-time service projects for the so-called “less fortunate.” Instead, congregations should work to establish lasting relationships with local communities, developing an understanding of what the partner community needs and wants from the relationship.

The third practice white congregations can begin is visiting other faith communities and traditions in order to cultivate a better understanding of traditions not their own.

Racism and oppression have historically developed out of fear and misunderstanding. White congregations can help defuse some of the racist attitudes of their congregational members by providing avenues for education. Closely related to this idea of education is practice four, which is bringing guest speakers into the congregational setting. If congregational members cannot, or will not, go to other communities to meet and learn about people different from themselves, then congregational leaders must bring the experience to the congregation. It is only through the development of cultural understandings and cross-cultural relationships that authentic change can take place.

The fifth practice that congregations can begin is to be sure that people know about the congregation's inclusive policies and statements. Congregations must adopt statements of inclusion describing who is welcome in the congregation. After the development of such statements congregations should be sure to make them visible at every possible opportunity. Such a practice is necessary for people from outside the congregation to know for sure they are indeed welcome.

In closing, individuals and congregations interested in becoming allies to all of those groups and people who have suffered due to white privilege and racism must become active. As noted above, becoming an ally and agent for anti-oppression change is complex and multi-faceted. It means taking risks. It is my hope that this dissertation contributes to challenging and changing the religio-cultural tools that keep racism and white privilege in place in order to create religio-cultural tools that are radically inclusive.

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APPENDIX A

SUBJECT PROFILES

Theresa Adams (H/S/F)¹ is a retired real estate agent and interior designer. Now in her seventies, Theresa volunteers for her church's food bank and after school programs. She lives alone after the death of her spouse and has an annual income of \$20,000-30,000 per year. She identifies with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Lucas Allen (H/M/M) a member of the Church of the Brethren, has a career as an advertising consultant with annual household income of \$120,000-130,000. He grew up within the United Methodist Church. At age 52, Lucas lives with his second spouse and two children.

Sara M. Butterfield (H/M/F), age 47, works in the legal field. She and her second husband live in a household of five. Although attending a Unitarian Universalist congregation, Sara has understood herself to be a Christian since early junior high school. Sara and her spouse have an annual income of \$140,000-150,000 per year.

Don Clark (Q/P/M) is a nonprofit mortgage lender. Don and his partner have an annual household income of \$300,000. At age 60, he has been a Christian for 50 years and a life long member of the Mennonite Church tradition.

Cadie Collins (H/M/F) identifies with the Salvation Army tradition but currently attends a Church of God. Cadie is in her mid-fifties and works as a homemaker. She lives with her husband and four children in a household with an annual income of \$40,000-50,000.

Craig J. Donaldson (H/S/M) is an entertainer and teacher. Craig lives with his partner and has an annual household income of \$40,000-50,000. He identifies as a Christian from the Catholic tradition, but also engages mysticism, pietism, and Eastern modes of meditation. Craig does not currently attend church.

Judy Ellsworth (H/S/F) is a professor. Now in her sixties, Judy lives alone after the death of her husband. She is a member of the United Church of Christ with an annual income of \$60,000-70,000.

Misty Greene (H/M/F) is a member of the Lutheran tradition (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Misty is a retired teacher and a lay professional. She lives with her husband in a two person household with an annual income of \$60,000-70,000.

Ruby Hayes (H/M/F) lives with her husband in a two person household with an annual income of \$90,000-100,000. She is a minister and a church administrator. At age 53, Ruby identifies with the Missionary tradition.

Brian Hendricks (H/M/M) is a factory worker with a household income of \$60,000-70,000 per year. At age 28 Brian lives with his spouse and two young children. Raised as "a hard core Christian," he identifies as a believer and a Christian but is not currently attending a church.

1. Designations are as follows: heterosexual (H) or queer (Q)/single (S), married (M), or partnered (P)/female (F), male (M), or transgendered (T).

Lynn Jennings (Q/P/F) lives with her spouse and their daughter. She is an educator and has a household income of \$90,000-100,000. Lynn was raised in the Assembly of God tradition but now identifies with the Church of the Brethren. She is 35 years of age.

Ralph Meyers (H/M/M) is a life long Christian who now identifies as Church of the Brethren. Ralph is 63 and an electronics engineer. He and his spouse have no children living at home. Ralph's annual household income is \$100,000-110,000.

Semus K. Miller (H/M/M) lives with his spouse of 28 years and two of his children. A city employee, Semus and family have an annual household income of \$60,000-70,000. Although Semus admits to recently not attending church as much as he should he identifies himself with the Church of God (Anderson). He is 56 years of age.

Kristen Mills (H/M/F) works full-time as an account manager for a local manufacturer. She lives at home with her spouse and two children. Kristen is member of the Church of God (Anderson) but grew up in the United Methodist's tradition. Kristen is 49 and has an annual household income of \$60,000-70,000.

Olivia Nolland (Q/P/F) grew up only attending church on occasion. She now attends the Church of the Brethren. Olivia is a 33 year old teacher. She lives in a three person household that includes her life partner and their daughter. Olivia and her partner have an annual income of \$90,000-100,000.

Jim Peters (H/M/M) is a lifelong member of Mennonite Church USA. He is a consultant with an annual household income of \$80,000-90,000 per year. Jim, 58 years of old, lives with his spouse in a two person household.

April Samuels (H/M/F) is a 22 year old full time stay-at-home mom. April enjoys spending time with her spouse and two children. April identifies as Christian but has never really attended church. Her annual household income is \$60,000-70,000 per year.

William Thomas (Q/P/M) is a 54 year old Chief Financial Officer. He and his spouse have a combined income of \$300,000 per year. William attended the United Methodist Church while growing up but now is a member of the Mennonite Church USA.

Parker Wallis (H/S/M) is an administrator at a marketing firm with an annual income of \$50,000-60,000. Peter has been a part of several Christian traditions, including Pentecostalism, but most recently has been attending an Assembly of God Church because of their style of worship. After several divorces Parker is now single and lives alone. He is 55 years of age.

Kent Wilson (H/M/M), 56, is a county employee. He and his spouse live with their three children and have an annual household income of \$40,000-50,000. Kent was raised in the Wesleyan tradition and in several independent churches but now attends a Church of God (Anderson).

APPENDIX B CHURCH DESCRIPTIONS

Community Missionary Church is affiliated with the Missionary Church, U.S.A. whose mission is, “in obedience to Jesus Christ her Lord, is committed to being holy people of God in the world and to building His Church by worldwide evangelism, discipleship and multiplication of growing churches, all to the glory of God.”¹ Community Missionary Church attempts to multiply disciples through a myriad of outreach programs including: worship, small groups, school programs, and service missions. The average attendance at Community Missionary is approximately 2100 with weekly giving of around \$50,000. Church attendees while predominantly white vary greatly in age and socio-economic status.

Love Presbyterian Church is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Love Presbyterian is a very small congregation with a membership averaging sixty-four in age. Weekly attendance at Love is approximately thirty. The congregation is active in outreach programs to the homeless and hungry of greater Fort Wayne.

God With Us Lutheran Church is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. God With Us is located in a economically depressed area. It provides outreach services to the hungry and the youth of the neighborhood. The congregation has an average attendance of fifty with giving of \$350 per week. The church depends on the denomination for much of its outreach budget.

1. Missionary Church U.S.A., “Purpose,”
[Http://www.mcusa.org/AboutMC/WhoWeAre/Purpose/tabid/388/Default.aspx](http://www.mcusa.org/AboutMC/WhoWeAre/Purpose/tabid/388/Default.aspx) (accessed 09 April 2010).

APPENDIX C RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Interview Questions

- Tell me about your faith journey.
- What does it mean to be Christian?
- Did you grow up Christian? What was that like? How has that impacted how you think now?
- Why are you a member of your current church?
- If you could see God's face what might it look like?
- If Jesus were to come back today what might he look like?
- Does your church talk about politics?
- How does being a Christian impact how you act toward others?
- What are your favorite scriptures?
- What are your favorite hymns?
- What is the role of the church life? In society? Or what is the mission of the church?
- Who are your role models?
- What does it mean to be saved?
- What does it mean to go to heaven?
- When will the kingdom come?
- What is the biggest problem Christians face today?
- What is Christian service?
- What is the role of women in the church? Members of the LGBT community in the Church?
- Tell me about the first time you encountered a person of another color.
- How did your family talk about race when you were growing up? How has that impacted how you think now?
- How would you describe yourself racially? What does that mean to you?
- Tell me about the first time you discovered there was a different sex.
- How did your family talk about women when you were growing up? How has that impacted how you think now?
- What do you do for a living? How would you describe yourself economically?
- What did your parents do for a living? How do you think that impacts who you are now?
- What does it mean to be a man? Images that come to mind or stereotypes.
- What does it mean to be a woman? Images that come to mind or stereotypes.
- When did you learn there were those who like people of the same sex?
- Tell me your thoughts about racism. How do you know someone is racist?
- Tell me your thoughts about sexism. How do you know someone is sexist?
- Tell me your thoughts about classism. How do you know someone is classist?
- What do you think about affirmative action?
- What do you think about immigration?
- What do you think about gay marriage?
- If I say that we benefit from white privilege, what does that mean to you?
- Some people believe whites are superior to people of color, how would you respond to that?
- Is the United States a Christian country?
- What does it mean to be an American?
- Should people of color have equal rights?
- Should members of the LGBT have equal rights?
- Should women have equal rights?

- On the new Indiana license plates and on most US currency it says, “In God we trust?” What does this mean to you?
- Do you have any friends of color? Gay friends?
- What is the American Dream? Can it be achieved by anyone?

Letter to Pastors/Church Leaders

<Church Name>
 <Church Address 1>
 <Church Address 2>
 <City, State Zipcode>

<date>

Dear Pastor <name>/Dear Board Chair <name>,

Greetings! My name is Dean Johnson and I am a PhD student at the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology. I am writing to ask for permission to use your congregation as a source for research subjects in a study I am conducting that will investigate the connections between white theology, the stories white people tell, and the ideas about race, class, gender, and sexual identity held by whites. Results will be used in the writing of a doctoral dissertation. This project is supervised by Dr. S. Lily Mendoza, Department of Human Communications Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303.871.4317.

Participation in this study would involve having access to your congregational rosters/directories. Congregational members would be selected randomly to complete a questionnaire, and if willing to, participate in interviews. All the information collected will remain anonymous and the identities of those participating protected.

The questionnaire should take about 75 minutes of the member’s time. Participation will involve responding to 35 questions about their demographic information, their faith/theology, and their understanding of race, class, gender, and sexual identity. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal and participants may discontinue participation at any time. Those who volunteer for interviews would be asked a series of questions over 2-3 one hour sessions.

I will be calling you within the next few days to talk about your willingness to allow me to use your congregation as a source for my research and next steps. I have included copies of the Project Information Sheet for your information. Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions about my research please feel free to contact me at the number/email below or Lily Mendoza (see information provided above).

Blessings as you continue your ministry.

Imagine,

Dean J. Johnson
 821 Northwood Blvd.
 Fort Wayne, IN 46805
 260.615.4206
deajohns@du.edu

This letter was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on August 27, 2007.

Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Participant,

Greetings! My name is Dean Johnson and I am a PhD student at the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology. I am contacting you as a potential subject for the study I am conducting. You were chosen anonymously and randomly. Maybe you have read about my work in your church bulletin. I am conducting research investigating the connections between white theology, the stories white people tell, and the ideas about race, class, gender, and sexual identity held by whites. Results will be used in the writing of a doctoral dissertation. This project is supervised by Dr. S. Lily Mendoza, Department of Human Communications Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303.871.4317, lmendoza@du.edu.

A Project Information Sheet and Questionnaire are enclosed. The questionnaire should take about 75 minutes of your time. Participation will involve responding to 35 questions about your demographic information, your faith/theology, and your understanding of race, class, gender, and sexual identity. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. All of your responses are completely anonymous. The risks associated with this project are minimal and you may discontinue participation at any time. You may also volunteer to be interviewed, which means talking with me about a series of questions over 2-3 one hour sessions. See the enclosed "Interview Participant Form."

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Please read over the enclosed Project Information Sheet carefully. Return your questionnaire in the enclosed envelope. If you have any questions about my research please feel free to contact me at the number/email below or Lily Mendoza (see information provided above).

Blessings as you continue your ministry.

Imagine,

Dean J. Johnson
821 Northwood Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46805
260.615.4206
deajohns@du.edu

This letter was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on August 27, 2007.

Questionnaire

Study of White *Theology and Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Identity*

You are invited to participate in a study that will investigate the connections between white theology, the stories white people tell, and the ideas about race, class, gender, and sexual identity held by whites. The study is being conducted by Dean J. Johnson, Master of Arts in Theology. Results will be used in the writing of a doctoral dissertation. Dean J. Johnson can be reached at 260.615.4206 or deajohns@du.edu. This project is supervised by Dr. S. Lily Mendoza, Department of Human Communications Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303.871.4317, lmendoza@du.edu. This questionnaire was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on _____. Please complete and return this questionnaire by (date will be 10 days after receipt) in the envelope provided or to the address provided.

Sex: Female Male Other/Questioning
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual Homosexual (gay/lesbian) Bi-sexual
Other/Questioning

Household Income:	Less than \$10,000	\$10,001- 20,000	\$20,001- 30,000
	\$30,001- 40,000	\$40,001- 50,000	\$50,001- 60,000
	\$60,001- 70,000	\$ 70,001- 80,000	\$80,001- 90,000
	\$90,001- 100,000	\$100,001- 110,000	\$100,001- 110,000
	\$110,001- 120,000	\$120,001- 130,000	\$130,001- 140,000
	\$140,001- 150,000	\$150,001- 160,000	\$160,001- 170,000
	\$170,001- 180,000	\$180,001- 190,000	\$190,001- 200,000
	More than \$200,000		

Number of Persons in Your Household: _____ Occupation: _____

Race and/or Ethnicity: _____

1) Do you consider yourself a Christian? No Yes If, yes for how long? _____

2) What does it mean to be a Christian? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

3) Name three Scriptures which help give your life direction/meaning? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

4) Name up to four people who you look up to. Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

5) What does Jesus look like in your mind? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

6) What role, if any, should the church have in politics? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

7) What images or words come to your mind when you think of God? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

8) If Jesus returned today, what would be the three biggest issues that would be addressed?
(Use back of sheet if necessary)

9) What is the mission of the church? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

10) Choose one: The Kingdom is Coming The Kingdom is Now The Kingdom is Now and is Coming
Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

11) How are you supposed to interact with people from different religious traditions or non-Christians? What is their role? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

12) How is it decided who gets into heaven and who does not? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

13) What, if any, is the role of homosexuals in the church? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

14) What, if any, is the role of women in the church? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

15) How would you describe yourself to someone who could not see you (for example in a phone conversation or online)? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

16) When growing up, how did your family talk about people of a different color? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

17) When did you become aware of people of color or racial differences? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

18) Do you think people of all races are equal? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

19) How does your church talk about race? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

20) Do you have any friends of color? No Yes If you answered yes please explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

21) When growing up, how did your family talk about the role of women? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

22) When did you become aware of the difference between boys and girls? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

23) How does your church talk about the difference between men and women? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

24) Do you think women and men are equal? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

25) When growing up, how did your family talk about the differences between the poor and the rich? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

26) How does your church talk about the rich and the poor? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

27) How would you characterize yourself economically growing up?

Upper-upper Class Upper Class Upper-middle Class
Middle Class Middle-working Class Working Class Poor

28) How would you characterize yourself economically now?

Upper-upper Class Upper Class Upper-middle Class
Middle Class Middle-working Class Working Class Poor

If you characterized yourself differently please explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

29) Do you think heterosexuals and homosexuals should be treated equally? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

30) Is Affirmative Action fair? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

31) What should be done about the immigration crisis in the United States? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

32) What should be done about gay marriage? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

33) Is the United States of America a Christian nation? Explain. (Use back of sheet if necessary)

34) How do you know when someone is racist, sexist, classist, or heterosexist? (Use back of sheet if necessary)

Please respond to the following with the first image that comes to mind, do not spend more than a few seconds on each one:

Man _____ Woman _____ Black _____ Hispanic/Latino _____

Indian _____ White _____ Poor _____ Rich _____

Black Man _____ Black Woman _____ Gay _____

Lesbian _____ Muslim _____ Arab _____ Jew _____

Christian _____ Atheist _____ Redneck _____

White Trash _____ Preacher/Minister _____

Please return this survey in the supplied envelope. You can also send it to:

Dean Johnson
821 Northwood Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46805

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study. Regular updates will be sent to your congregation about my progress. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Imagine,

Dean J. Johnson