

Introduction

Who We Are Becoming

One fall Saturday morning in Minnesota, a group of white teachers and two white teacher educators spent 3 hours together in a basement classroom of a university teacher education building. As we were wrapping up, one teacher, Angela, with tears in her eyes, asked why she had not had access to the information we had presented in either her teacher education program or her more than 2 decades of practice. Like most of the teachers in the room that morning, Angela had been to many diversity and equity trainings and professional development (PD) sessions—and often felt frustrated. In the following 2 years, our collective work would help her, particularly in interacting with other white teachers in her building. She explained the second month that she “came back because I *had* to—well, not had to, but need to. I felt really empowered . . . I need to do something that is head-heavy, nourishing, educational.”

This book attempts an impossibility: to analyze and share what happened in and as a result of this 2-year PD seminar—RaceWork—for white practicing teachers. This impossibility arises out of three complications: (1) We (Zac and Shannon) were simultaneously *facilitating* the group as we were *researching* it; (2) as scholars and teacher educators, we are simultaneously proud of our work with this group yet wish to remain scholarly and critical of antiracist pedagogies (including our own) with practicing teachers; and (3) as scholars, teachers, and people in relationships with these eight teachers, we are well aware that we can never completely rid ourselves of the possibility of committing violence in writing about our work, whether through omission, our own interpretation, or the ways in which we share—or don’t share—these stories. In other words, in many ways we are too close to this group, to this “data,” to write from a position of disinterested-objective academician. And so we have made the

writerly decision to suspend such demands of academic writing. We also state upfront that we are writing from a place of love and the utmost respect, gratitude, and awe for these eight teachers.

We want to tell you, the reader, what happened when we broke the mold of professional development focused on race and racism for white practicing teachers. We want to tell you how we organized our sessions, and why we read what we read and did what we did. We want to tell you about the incredible antiracist practices these teachers enacted in their own school settings. We also want to tell you about the complications, difficulties, and failures of our collective work. Finally, we want to tell you what we think others can learn from our group about combatting white supremacy in schools.¹

Before we can proceed to the stories and analyses of RaceWork, we need to set the scene a bit more explicitly, because, as Nicole, one of the participating teachers, wrote at the end of our first of 2 years together, we need to “remember [that] nothing is free of context.” In this introductory chapter, after these contexts, we write about RaceWork’s origins, our goals, and introduce key terms necessary to situate our work and that of the eight RaceWork teachers. Last, we outline the chapters that follow and explain the title of this book. First, we explain our contexts of time, space, and who we are as white people that led us toward building antiracist pedagogues in Minnesota in 2012.

Contexts: Time, Space, and (White) Community

We wrote this book in 2017 and 2018, a time that feels extraordinarily different racially from when we started RaceWork, in 2012. In 2012, we were nearing the end of Barack Obama’s first term as the first Black (and nonwhite) president of the United States.² His election, in 2008, had been

1. “White supremacy” here should be understood as analogous with the term “systemic or structural racism.” By white supremacy we mean the overarching racialized system of belonging, value, and worth that has resulted in peoples of European descent in the United States occupying positions of power and superiority over those seen as nonwhite and peoples of color. White supremacy signals the primary logic of racialized exploitation, genocide, conquest, and settler colonialism that animates our contemporary social reality. We detail our own conception of white supremacy in greater detail in chapter 1.

2. It is worth noting that President Barack Obama was born to a white mother and Black father. However, given the legacies of “one-drop” laws and practices to protect the interests of white elites, and the ways in which white supremacy continues to distort and limit possibilities for racial configurations that do not neatly

widely lauded as a sign that we, in the United States, were “postracial,” “proving” that meritocracy works in this country, that no matter one’s racial identity, anyone can aspire to and be elected to the highest office. Of course, this assertion itself was highly racialized—with many more white people asserting a postracial stance than people of color or Indigenous people. And often, white people who talked about a postracial society took an explicitly “colorblind” stance—it is not “necessary,” or even polite, to acknowledge race and the legacies of racial oppression. (We say much more about “colorblindness” in Chapter 1.)

In the years that followed, though, the lie of a supposed postracial society continued to be challenged overtly, just as it had always been in communities of color. High-profile killings of Black people—Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Aiyana Jones, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott (and too many more)—by police, while in police custody, or extra-judicially, along with the frequent legal exoneration of those involved, led to the creation of the international but decentralized movement Black Lives Matter in 2013. Social media brought us news nearly daily of racialized oppression. It became less and less weird for us (Shannon and Zac) to get blank or quizzical looks when we told people that we were critical whiteness scholars. More white people seemed to be aware—as people of color and Indigenous people have always had to be—that “white” is also a racial identity. In 2016, for instance, the white hip hop duo Macklemore & Ryan Lewis released a song (featuring Jamila Woods) called “White Privilege II.” Later that year, Donald Trump was elected by the electoral college to the presidency after explicitly courting white voters who were upset about assertions that the United States was not now nor had it ever been a white nation, despite resources and power being disproportionately concentrated in white hands. In other words, to start this book, we want to point out that conversations about race have shifted over the last decade—even as they’ve largely stayed the same.

Also important to know are the spatial contexts in which this PD work occurred: What is now known as the Twin Cities of Minnesota (Minneapolis and St. Paul) occupies Dakota and Anishanabek land and is home to many Indigenous peoples. In recent centuries, Minnesota has had a reputation as a white space, populated by people of Scandinavian descent. But the Twin Cities are home to incredibly diverse groups of peoples—and as someone once said, our diversity is more diverse than in

map on to binaristic or census-based racial and ethnic classifications, Obama was and continues to be interpolated not as mixed race or “half-white” but as Black. Our reference here intends to situate the very different racio-political moments we are navigating in this work: professional development in the Obama years, written about in the Trumpocene.

many places. For instance, the St. Paul area is home to one of the world's largest Hmong populations, who immigrated there after the 1960s/1970s war in southeast Asia (Vietnam and Laos). The area is also home to one of the world's largest Somali diasporas, with between 40,000 and 80,000 people of Somali descent. While still majority white, the area is home to a wide range of people of many racial and ethnic identities, including American Indians. Yet as in other metropolitan areas across the country, neighborhoods—and thus schools—are quite often segregated. And as in other cities, regentrification has also meant that many residents of color are being pushed out of urban areas and into suburban schools and neighborhoods. But despite our “diverse diversity,” most white people in the area aren't any better at talking about this—and particularly about what it means to be white.

In the first episode of their *Code Switch* podcast, Meraji and Demby (2016) assert that we're really, really bad at talking about what it means to be white in the United States. Demby said that part of this difficulty and discomfort is that

We've had this reflexive habit of talking about what's normal or what's default in American politics in ways that are really, really just about white people in white culture. But we're not really used to talking about white people directly as their own identity group . . . It's like whiteness is everywhere and invisible all at once. So trying to put your hands around it is like trying to hold on to air.

It was this simultaneous invisible-everywhereness that we, as two white people, wanted to address with other white people and specifically with white people teaching in public schools. This was our responsibility, following Darder (2011), who wrote,

There must be an active commitment by those from the dominant culture to work in their own communities and to challenge forms of injustice that result from racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, disablism, and other forms of institutional oppression, for all forms of oppression are inextricably linked to the overarching consequences of a political economy that chews up our hearts to feed the fat royal beast of capital. (p. 90)

Our explicitly acknowledged identities as white people who needed to address white supremacy are thus the third context of our work: We believe that white supremacy is, at its heart and soul, a white people's problem enacted

on the bodies and communities of peoples of color, but one that is also destructive to white people. Rather than leaving attempts to dismantle it solely to people of color, we, as white people, must also do the work. We are committed politically to a praxis premised on the idea that it is our particular responsibility to do this work with white teachers and students.

Origins of RaceWork: Who We Are and What We Decided to Try

In 2009, both of us, Zac and Shannon, moved to Minnesota to begin the Culture and Teaching doctoral program (a specialization within the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota), wanting to study and act on race and racism—and, in particular, white racial identity. We met at the first day of orientation; soon we were having weekly conversations about our new lives in Minnesota. Within a month, we participated in the first meeting of the newly created Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective (MCWC), a non-university-based research group of academics, educators, practitioners, and activists. Over the next years, MCWC took on a serious study of McIntosh's (1988) groundbreaking writing on white privilege, talking, presenting, and publishing on our work.

As doctoral students, drawing on knowledges we had arrived with and were further developing through MCWC and other spaces, we (Shannon and Zac) spoke and presented at a number of conferences for practitioners and educational researchers. These talks were so well received that we found ourselves repeatedly invited to give similar versions to other groups in other settings. Excited to share our work with others, we always agreed to speak with whomever would have us, never asking for compensation. We spoke in college courses, to student groups, to teaching assistants and university instructors, and to academics. A common theme emerged across these settings: Almost everyone wished that they had either learned more about the history of white supremacy and white racial identity in their formal educations or that they could engage in such study longer than the hour or two we were able to spend with them.

During these years, Zac organized a small group of practicing teachers who had taken various courses with him and wished to continue meaningful conversations about race and difference. Dubbing themselves the White Anti-Oppressive Teacher Support Group, the five members met once a month for 6 months during the 2011–2012 school year. While Zac sent a chapter or two to read between each session, meetings were largely about story sharing and, well, supporting one another. As each teacher worked in a different school and district, the group served as a

sounding board and as a place for teachers to not feel as isolated as they often did. Still, the group was primarily social and cathartic, rather than explicitly intentional around building capacity for anti-oppressive work in classrooms and schools. The group met to help one another feel better about the daunting and dehumanizing realities of our institutions, but it became clear that we needed to do more. These teachers wanted more: not just to talk, but to figure out *what to do*.

At the same time, Shannon was conducting research for our teacher education program by interviewing principals and teachers at local area partner schools. Many of these educators spoke about the changing racial demographics of their schools or racialized disparities; they were looking for tools and resources to equip teachers. Some had hired PD organizations to do this work.

We also saw these needs in the courses we taught and recognized them in our own histories. For Shannon, a decade spent doing antiracism work with adults had been a—probably *the*—compelling factor in going back to school; her experiences working with white adults in their 50s, 60s, and 70s led her to ask why we weren't more frequently doing this work in public schools. Animated by commitments to combatting white supremacy and by the experience outlined here, we, Zac and Shannon, believed that such work would never achieve its full transformative power if white people were not more explicitly figured as antiracist actors. Again, white supremacy is a white problem, and white people must explicitly oppose and dismantle it if we are to ever overcome its devastation and dehumanization.

We talked about all of this frequently. We shared stories—our own and others—of white educators getting stuck trying to do antiracist work. We were struck by the chasm we felt between academic research or analyses of race and racism and the professional development and teacher education curricula we had experienced, curricula that also dominated the social justice/activism circles in which Shannon had worked prior to moving to Minneapolis. Such programs rely almost exclusively—or at minimum begin with or are premised—on white privilege frameworks. (See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion.) While these programs can often support educators who have spent little to no time considering the ways in which their work is culpable in maintaining the oppressive status quo, they often result in a kind of “dead end” for participants who have been engaged in such work for a more extended period of time. That is, white privilege frameworks tend to be circular: The object is to help white people understand their relative privilege. Such consciousness is supposed to lead to antiracist actions, although this is almost never elaborated, resulting in participants sharing sentiments along the lines of “OK, I get that I have privilege, and I can recognize privilege, but what should I *do*?”

This is, of course, tied in with what Charlie, a teacher introduced later in this chapter, reminded us often: “Teachers want the checklist.” In other words, many teachers desire explicit strategies, checklists, and instructions, yet explicit instruction around classroom procedures is rejected by most culturally relevant or sustaining and multicultural pedagogies. If we tell a teacher exactly what to do, we foreclose possibilities for engaged learning with the *actual* students who inhabit our classrooms. As Ladson-Billings (2006b), teaching in an undergraduate teacher education course, told her students,

Even if we could tell you how to do it, I would not want us to tell you how to do it. . . . The reason I would not tell you what to do is that you would probably do it! . . . In other words, you would probably do exactly what I told you to do without any deep thought or critical analysis. You would do what I said regardless of the students in the classroom, their ages, their abilities, and their need for whatever it is I proposed. (p. 39)

Social justice-oriented PD tends to do the same, even as teachers often report feeling stifled by a lack of concrete suggestions. Arguing that “we can’t tell you what to do, because then you would do it” feels like an easy-out to many practitioners. It feels overly academic, possibly even condescending.

Concomitantly, many teachers have experienced PD that feels overtly infantilizing, that positions teachers as if they don’t know or understand anything about their students or contexts. These PD experiences tend to feature an expert from somewhere else, who hasn’t spent a day in their school, yet knows everything that’s wrong with it and how to fix it, providing solutions or formulas.

Because of such challenges, both of us had previously shied away from PD as a meaningful way for us to engage educators or teacher candidates in antiracist work.³ But we thought we could try something different. Our research and presentations on the history of white racial identities and storytelling as antiracist praxis taught us that there was a great desire for opportunities to get smarter about race and structural racism. Our work with practicing teachers, in the support group and in partnership schools,

3. We prefer the term “teacher candidates” to “pre-professional,” “preservice,” or “future” teachers. This move is intentional, as we understand the work of teaching and becoming as always ongoing. Rather than making our teacher education a preparation for the future, we are motivated by Dewey’s (1897/2010) maxim that “education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 22).

taught us the limits of most professional development for antiracism. The teachers we were working with wanted more: more engagement, more time to dig into this work, and more support to take risks and to create more antiracist classrooms and schools. Our study and writing with the Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective taught us that we cannot be content with the most widely cited and read account of white privilege as if such an account were the *only* way of engaging white people in understanding white supremacy (see Lensmire et al., 2013). A new project was taking shape, built out of our work as teachers, researchers, and facilitators. In the spring of 2012, we were ready to start something more formal, more official, than the various talks and discussion groups we had been a part of until then. We decided to call it RaceWork.

RaceWork Goals

We wanted RaceWork to be different from what we had experienced. We wanted to center praxis—critical reflection and action—and to create a space that honored the experiences and expertises of teachers. We also wanted to put our academic work into practice—to engage white practicing teachers, based on our interpretations and syntheses of critical whiteness studies and critical pedagogy literatures. We wanted to emphasize the materiality of racism and antiracism, rather than a too-frequent emphasis on rhetoric. We wanted to engage antiracism as a way of being. As living out our commitments is terribly trying and fraught with difficulty and isolation that often override our collaborative impulses, we decided to build a group based on a simple organizing principle: Rather than grouping around subject matter, grade level, or geography, we recruited, via email, white practicing teachers who were committed to working to combat structural racism in schools and classrooms. We sent this invitation to teachers and administrators in groups we had contact with, such as from the districts Shannon had been interviewing or the White Anti-Oppressive Teacher Support Group Zac was meeting with; we encouraged forwarding the invitation as well. We initially planned to offer a 1-year PD experience. And then something amazing happened: We actually *did it*. We started with the idea that we would spend a year together, but at the end of that 1st year, all eight RaceWork teachers asked if we could continue working together the next year. So, we did.

Our work had three aims: first, to develop and enact a meaningful PD experience for practicing teachers focusing on their own white racial identities and the ways in which these racial identities impact and influence their teaching practice; second, to empower teachers to undertake structural, antiracist change in their classrooms and schools; and third, to research

this experience. While these three objectives are explored throughout this book, we briefly detail them below.

PD Focusing on White Racial Identities and Legacies of White Supremacy in Schools

Our primary goal was for teachers to experience meaningful racial equity PD. We began with a premise that teachers, like all people, are intellectuals (a la Gramsci, 1971) and that in many ways, it is not possible to do the extraordinarily challenging work of antiracism without deep historical and theoretical understandings—or at least that these nuanced concepts provide grounding for the moments when the work feels impossible or insurmountable. We thus created an intellectually grounded curriculum to engage teachers in understanding the ongoing legacy of structural racism in schools and society. We knew that our PD group would need a serious understanding not only of the history of white supremacy, but of how that history has acted upon, and continues to act upon, schools and schooling. Too often, white people learn the history of racism as a series of events from the past, as something that society as a whole has “gotten over”—as in the “postracial America” examples mentioned above. While our early work focused on the history of white supremacy and white racial identity, we were careful to make connections to the present realities of schools and classrooms, analyzing the ways in which white supremacist aims and projects are taken up in schools. Teachers connected these to their own contemporary experiences.

This also meant working with these practicing white teachers to develop a rich and nuanced understanding of ourselves as racialized white actors in our own teaching contexts. As critical whiteness scholars, we have seen that too often the emphasis on understanding privilege belies the more complex and nuanced identities of white people. No one is reducible solely to their racial identity; we are never *just* our race, as our identities are made up of thousands upon thousands of commitments, positionalities, determinations, performances, behaviors, and habits. As we move in social space, our identities are figured primarily from two vantage points: our own internal sense of self and the way(s) we are interpolated by others. Thus, regardless of my own self-identity, I am always also simultaneously figured along various schema by those who are interacting with me. White identity has meaning only within the current structural nature of white supremacy and how it constitutes particular subjectivities. To appear white in social space is to be read within a series of codes and norms. We thus worked to understand how each of us and our families became white, the origins of white racial identity in the United States, and the complexities surrounding white antiracist positionalities.

Enacting Structural, Antiracist Change in Classrooms and Schools

These knowledges (and reflection on them) are not, by themselves, enough—or, as Patel (2016) has argued, we wanted our research (and teaching) to focus on *material* changes, not changes solely in words. Thus, our second goal was to work with teachers to collaboratively develop and then implement structural, antiracist change in their classrooms and schools so as to address our first and most critical commitment as teachers: the well-being and learning of our students. We sought to make explicit the ways in which increasing dialogue and engagement with issues of race and structural racism are central to the development of sociopolitical and critical consciousness with students. We wanted teachers to be able to improve learning outcomes for their students through antiracist pedagogical strategies, to forge new connections and relationships that supported students and their families in robust ways, and/or to engage in critical dialogue on race with their students and colleagues.

Here, of course, we bump into the problem of not telling teachers “what to do.” Thus, we entered this PD with no preexistent strategies or checklists for RaceWork teachers to follow. Rather, we would work collectively, over time, to support teachers in developing their own antiracist, uniquely contextual, and situated pedagogical interventions in their schools, classrooms, or districts. Importantly, we approached this work with a commitment to *sustaining* engagement with white supremacy and antiracist pedagogies. Rather than a single day, or even a series of days in a workshop, we wanted to build iteratively and scaffold ways that teachers’ work in schools could combat white supremacy, thus rejecting the fly-in-fly-out model of professional development with prepackaged lessons and strategies.

Over our time together, the eight teachers who joined us in RaceWork designed and tried out their own antiracist changes. From the beginning, we were careful to delineate what we meant by antiracist. For instance, we asked teachers not to focus on the overcoded concept of “academic achievement” tied to standardized test scores. Our goal was never just to raise the test scores or grades of students of color, but to develop antiracist ways in which to engage students in culturally relevant and sustaining ways, to self-appropriate learning, to create knowledge. We built from the premise that all of our students, in all of our classrooms, possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise on their own lived experiences that can be built upon in each and every course. We must mobilize students’ “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) to help them connect what they already know to course content and curriculum. At the same time, we acknowledged we should not reduce antiracist pedagogies merely to “good teaching,” understanding that “teaching well” is not

enough to eliminate white supremacy from our classrooms. We wanted to avoid making the mistake of reducing structural oppressions to the level of individual social actors.

Last, we acknowledged that while talk is not enough, we must get better at talking. For instance, while often ashamed to admit it, many white teachers find parents and students of color intimidating. They worry that they will “misspeak” or “offend” and as a result often resort to silence and omission. RaceWork teachers had very different experiences and feelings regarding interactions with parents and students of color. Some felt comfortable interacting with students, but not with parents, some felt fully confident in interacting with people of color across various ages, and some felt stunted in all of their interactions with people of color. Importantly, we emphasized the ways in which our antiracist pedagogical work must be *with* others, not *for* others.

Research

Our final goal was to research this process, both contributing to the research literature on work for social change within schools and asking teachers to engage in their own forms of research in action. We wanted our work, and everything that we learned with and from these teachers, to support ongoing efforts in educational research, professional development, and teacher education. We thus embedded the data collection (for more about data collection and analysis see Appendix B) that animates what we share in this book. We have shared some of the results of this work at professional conferences; this book represents the culmination of our research and our pedagogy in RaceWork. Importantly, we work to center the teachers and their interventions, struggles, and reflections. This book is not so much about *how* we engaged RaceWork as facilitators, but rather about what teachers took from their work with us, and what we learned from and with them in the process. *Building Pedagogues*, then, is not primarily about *us*, but rather about the work and learning of RaceWork teachers and what happened in their classrooms and schools—where anti-racist changes are most needed.

Contexts: Key Terms and Participating Teachers

These goals provided context for our work and practices together. Also important was building a shared understanding of what we were working on and toward; often we assume a shared understanding without actually doing the work of clarification. While emphasizing the materiality of racism

and antiracism, we also know that language is powerful and that our words have dramatic and important consequences for racial justice work. The more explicit we can be about what we mean and why we are making our discursive choices, the more space is opened up for antiracism that goes beyond (just) language. Thus, before introducing the eight RaceWork teachers, we outline some key terms that provide additional contexts for our approaches to antiracist work with white teachers.

White Supremacy and Structural Oppression

Perhaps the most important concept in RaceWork, white supremacy refers to “an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by [elite] white peoples and nations . . . for the purposes of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege” (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop). Rather than “racism,” white supremacy functions to name the cause of racialized oppression (whiteness), includes people of color as participating in systems of oppression (e.g., buying goods made by people who are oppressed for the benefit of cheaper costs for those with more relative privilege), and focuses on the structural and historical nature of oppression as it impacts people’s lives.

White supremacy is structural and systemic. Discussions of racism sometimes focus on individual acts of meanness or bigotry rather than on the larger social forces that operate more directly on the life chances of actual people. While individual racist acts or beliefs must be challenged, some of the acts most harmful to people of color take place without intended malice. Racism is bigger than any individual actor, which is why the term “white supremacy” accomplishes so much in terms of its explanatory power for the focus of our antiracist work.

Pedagogy/Pedagogical

Pedagogy, in its simplest form, is the art of teaching. But pedagogy is more complex than that. Freire (1998) has written that a pedagogue is an educator “who has a political understanding of the task of teaching” (p. 57). All teaching and learning are inherently political, enmeshed with competing claims of justice and injustice, right and wrong, and these claims are often hidden and depoliticized. To approach a problem or theory pedagogically is to privilege the learner and ask the critical question, “what is this teaching?” Pedagogy can then be understood as intentional, political, student-centered teaching (Casey, 2016).

To approach antiracism pedagogically means not to seek to “call out” moments of individual racism, but rather to approach all people as having

valuable knowledge with which they can work to build more critical stances on issues of racial equity. It also means that we understand that antiracist dispositions, given our current state of institutionalized white supremacy, require work to learn; different folks will want and need different things and will need different amounts of time to engage in this work.

White/Black Focus of Race in the United States

Some people wonder why discussions of race and racism in the United States frequently center on Black–white racial dynamics and history. It is important to remind ourselves and others why this is so: Because whiteness was literally invented in opposition to Blackness. As Morrison (1993) put it, “Nothing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery” (p. 38). In what is now the United States, “whiteness” was invented in colonial Virginia to distinguish slave/servants of European descent from those of African descent in the hopes of creating a false sense of solidarity along racial lines between the white elite land/slave holders and white servants/slaves. This was done out of fear on the part of white elites, who believed that people of African descent and European descent might unite to overthrow their oppressors. This same practice—pitting poor and otherwise marginalized white and Black people (and other peoples of color and Indigenous peoples) against one another—continues to this very day, as we’ll discuss in Chapter 1.

Privilege/White Privilege

One way that this happens is through white privilege, a term that refers to the unearned advantages that come with having white skin or a white racial identity in a white supremacist society, such as being able to shop in a store without being suspected of shoplifting, usually being able to talk with a person of one’s own race when asking to speak with “the person in charge,” not having to serve as a representative of one’s race, and not having to educate one’s children about structural racism for their own safety. But privilege is always relative. We are all complex actors; no one is reducible *solely* to their privilege (or solely to their racial identity). Additionally (and probably more importantly), privilege is not the *cause* of racism and white supremacy, but an *effect*, of the true cause: oppression. We discuss this much further in chapters to come.

Intersectionality

To help understand the complexity of our identities, we turned to intersectionality, a concept drawn from Crenshaw (1989) and Critical Black

Feminism: We can never fully understand one system of oppression without understanding how other systems of oppression impact and inform it—how they intersect. For Crenshaw, her experience of oppression as a woman is racialized, as a Black woman; her experience of oppression as a person of color is gendered, as a woman. To treat either as distinct would be to ignore core components of our lived reality. Often, sources of resistance to conversations about race and racism are the ways in which other systems of oppression and forms of identity are ignored.

RaceWork Teachers

We—Shannon and Zac—have already introduced ourselves. Now we will introduce each of the eight teachers (although their names are pseudonyms) in RaceWork that you will meet in this book.

Amelia works in an urban high school as a chemistry and physical sciences teacher. At the time of RaceWork, she was in her 6th and 7th years of teaching. Amelia grew up in North Dakota and attended university in Minnesota. She has worked in the same district, one of the largest and most ethnically and racially diverse districts in the state, throughout her teaching career. The majority of students at her school are people of color and qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Like all of the teachers in RaceWork, the majority of her colleagues are white. Amelia's district had contracted with a number of PD programs centered on white privilege and antiracism in recent years, resulting in many teachers feeling “attacked” and creating a pervasive sense of fear around issues of race and racism throughout the district. Amelia's first school was closed due to district enrollment shifts; thus, while she had already been teaching for 5 years before beginning at her current school, her status as a “new” teacher to the building was a significant source of trepidation.

Angela was the only teacher in our group who had been teaching for more than 2 decades. Stationed in Spain after enlisting in the Navy, she became fluent in Spanish before being discharged and attending university in Wisconsin. She became dual-certified in Spanish Education and in English Language Learning, before teaching for 6 months in Japan. Following this, she moved to the Twin Cities area and began working in a Catholic elementary school. Feeling stifled by the religious demands placed on her, she left this position after a year to move to a suburban district as an English Learner (EL) specialist. Her work with ELs and their families “continued to open my eyes to ways of life that are unique and different than middle-class white people, white people that I grew up with,” she told us early in our work together. Angela has been in the same district, working in two elementary schools, ever since. She was in her 23rd year

of teaching when she began RaceWork. Due to a series of family crises, Angela was able to attend only one session during our 2nd year together. She remained a critically important figure in the group, however, with other members regularly referencing her in discussions and reflections. Angela has been a vocal proponent for greater attention and services for English Learners in her district, to the extent that she reported that others in her district saw her as a “broken record” when it came to issues of equity and justice. She worried other teachers would not be able to “hear” her, that because she had been so vocal in the past, and because of who she was, the messenger, others would not take her input seriously.

Charlie works in an immediate suburban school as a 3rd- and 4th-grade teacher.⁴ She was in her 4th and 5th years of teaching while participating in RaceWork. Charlie’s school is comprised primarily of working-class communities of color, particularly African American, Eastern African, East Asian, and Latinx. Over 80% of the district’s students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Charlie lived outside of the United States for most of her childhood and served in the Peace Corps after graduating from a university in Minnesota. Charlie had been the chair of her school’s equity team for a year prior to beginning RaceWork and has remained in this leadership capacity ever since. She is seen in her building as an equity leader; this status has often been a source of conflict for her, particularly with more veteran white teachers.

Lisa was in her 3rd and 4th years of teaching during her time in RaceWork. She works as a French teacher in a racially and economically diverse immediate suburban district, in a combination middle and high school. Lisa attended university in Wisconsin and Vermont before beginning her teaching career in her home state of Minnesota. Of the group members, Lisa had spent the least amount of time formally engaged in professional development or teacher education around issues of race and racism. Her work with us focused nearly as much on her relationships with her family—particularly her father, who expressed deep-seated resentments against people of color and the community Lisa taught in, comprised almost entirely of peoples of color—as it did with her relationships with her students. Lisa’s engagement with us saw her grow both in independence from her family and in her confidence as an educator.

Morgan works in a suburban elementary school as a 5th-grade teacher. During her time in RaceWork, she was in her 5th and 6th years

4. By “immediate suburban” we mean communities immediately adjacent to either St. Paul or Minneapolis. As we discuss throughout subsequent chapters, many of the schools in historically “white” neighborhoods and communities are increasingly attended by more students of color.

of teaching. Morgan began her career in an all-white rural school hours from the Twin Cities, not far from where she completed her undergraduate degree. After 1 year at the school, she moved to the district she herself had attended, becoming a teacher at the same school she went to in her elementary years. In fact, she was hired by the same principal who worked there when she was a student. The district has experienced a greater than 40% increase in the number of students of color it serves in recent years. Despite this significant shift in demographics, most teachers in Morgan's school and district have resisted learning about race and white supremacy as it impacts their work, believing that such concerns are not relevant for them in their still majority-white area. Feeling "young" and being positioned that way by senior teachers who knew her as an elementary schooler was a significant point of tension for Morgan.

Nicole was in her 4th and 5th years of teaching while participating in RaceWork. Nicole's mother has been a teacher for more than 20 years and served as a model for her of what a teacher committed to social justice ought to do. After attending university in Wisconsin, Nicole began her teaching career at a suburban high school in her home state of Minnesota. Her year at the school was characterized by intense racial conflicts between students, who maintained rigid hierarchies around racialized friend groups, with Black, white, and Latinx students self-segregating and resisting efforts to combat racial tensions. Following this, Nicole moved to a rural school district in a small college town, commuting from the suburbs each day. She worked for 2 years in the alternative high school before taking a full-time English teacher position at the mainstream high school. In this rural, predominantly white context, Latinx students disproportionately live in low-income housing with their families who work in agriculture-related industries. Her school is comprised of a majority of white, middle-class students, many of whom have parents with advanced college degrees, and a small but significant number of students from immigrant families of color. Nicole struggled to help her colleagues understand that while the majority of their students are highly successful, students of color were being stifled and undermined through a lack of engagement of their needs by teachers and staff.

Sarah was in her 1st and 2nd years as Dean of Students for an immediate suburban middle school. After completing her undergraduate degree in Minnesota, she began her teaching journey working in the same private elementary school she had attended. She taught 2nd grade for 3 years, before moving to her current district as a middle school science teacher, as she was dissatisfied working in the homogenous environment of her first school. She was in the classroom in her middle school for 9 years, serving primarily as a life science teacher for 6th grade. As Dean,

Sarah was responsible for student discipline and for standardized testing. Her district, similar to Morgan's, has rapidly increasing numbers of students of color and students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. Sarah was struck over the course of her first year as Dean by the frequency and consistency of students who were referred to her by the same teacher multiple times. Taking a restorative justice approach, by the end of the school year immediately following her time in RaceWork, Sarah had led her school to more than a 50% decrease in student referrals and suspensions. Despite this success, Sarah regularly finds herself in conflict with other administrators over policies and procedures regarding student discipline. She is currently pursuing her principal licensure.

Veronica works in an exurban district as a high school social studies teacher. She was in her 8th and 9th years of teaching while participating in RaceWork. Veronica's school is one of the most highly regarded public schools in the state, regularly earning awards and accolades for academic performance, as well as boasting nearly universal high school graduation and college acceptance rates. After attending a private, Christian undergraduate college in Minnesota, she began working at her current school just 10 days after college graduation and has been there ever since. While Veronica's school is overwhelmingly white (over 90%), she has worked for years to build more antiracist capacities with both students and colleagues. By her 2nd year of work with us, Veronica came to be positioned as a building "expert" on issues of race and social justice, a status she was deeply uncomfortable with, believing that her upbringing as Christian and conservative conflicted with such a mantle. While she has led and organized a number of activities and workshops for students and teachers, she remains uncomfortable with the "bubble" that her school community creates and maintains for itself.

Outline of Chapters

The five sections of *Building Pedagogues* explore the work of these eight teachers in their time with us. Following this Introduction in which we have introduced RaceWork and its concepts and participating teachers, Chapter 1 explores what we read: the written texts that animated our work and how we sequenced them. This chapter situates our work in scholarship on whiteness and outlines our tripartite approach to white supremacy: simultaneous work against white supremacy at the level of the personal, the local, the structural. It discusses what we as a group read about antiracist action, language, and approaches. Chapter 2 explores what we did together as a group, starting with our understandings of the classroom and

pedagogy and including our articulation of white supremacy. We then move to stories and analysis of RaceWork and the antiracist praxis of these eight white teachers, organized in a way that follows the tripartite structure we engaged of thinking on the personal, local, and structural levels.

This work starts in Part 1 of this book, about the personal, our own mental terrain. Chapter 3 explores fears, whereas Chapter 4 looks at personal change. Fear is one reason white people fail to engage in antiracism; we must explicitly address our fears to avoid getting stuck in them. Chapter 3 explores four fears RaceWork teachers confronted: getting it wrong, not doing enough, harming existing relationships, and being called racist. The chapter argues that we can mobilize these fears as a productive part of antiracist praxis. To address these fears also means undertaking personal change. Chapter 4 thus unpacks ways in which RaceWork teachers experienced personal change, specifically in terms of their growing sociopolitical consciousness and racial fluency.

Part 2 is about the local: those spaces immediately around us over which we have some influence. At the level of the Local, we are intimately involved with other people. Thus, Chapter 5 is concerned with relationships and, specifically, how RaceWork teachers worked to center antiracism in their relationships with each other, with their students, with their students' families, and with like-minded others. It argues that building these pedagogical relationships—and thus an antiracist community—is critical to our work. But this is not easy. Chapter 6 is thus about the tensions RaceWork teachers experienced in doing antiracist work in their buildings, particularly due to liberal individualist conceptions of racism. It details the costs of doing antiracist work in schools, as RaceWork teachers were blamed for calling attention to white supremacy, as they stuck up for students, and as their institutions reproduced white supremacy.

The two chapters of Part 3 deal with the structural: Chapter 7 on white privilege and Chapter 8 on the conundrum of seeing and getting “it.” White privilege is the most common approach to dealing with structural racism in PD contexts. But how does this get taken up in schools? Chapter 7 works to (re)define white privilege, exploring how white privilege was both a powerful way of naming RaceWork teachers' own racialized experiences as well as a structural barrier to engaging their colleagues more robustly in antiracist work. Chapter 8 explores how white supremacy was conceptualized through a common phrase RaceWork teachers used: “getting it.” “Getting it” (or not) stood in for ways in which other teachers did (or did not) connect the personal and local with the structural: how they came to a process of “reading racially.” We also argue here that “getting it” can never just be about words, but must also be about materially enacting antiracism.

The final section of the book (“The Work”) offers some unfinished and tentative conclusions for doing the ongoing work. Through examples from each teacher, Chapter 9 details the complex and unique approaches and beliefs RaceWork teachers took as they persisted in their antiracist convictions and actions, enacting antiracism through both doing and being. RaceWork teachers resisted both their own and their colleagues’ desires for the simplicity of checklists and strategies. Chapter 10 offers our thoughts on the future of antiracist PD, or what might better be called *critical teacher learning*. RaceWork is a model for antiracist professional development and ongoing teacher education—in other words, critical teacher learning. Yet it is in many ways paradoxical and unreplicable. That is, we do not suggest a rigid set of steps to follow for antiracist PD, because it would lead to the “Yes, but how do we do it?” conundrum that Ladson-Billings (2006) cited in relationship to culturally relevant pedagogy: This work—and, by extension, this book—cannot be prescriptive nor center “best practices” as if such practices can be applied and effective in any professional development context. Thus, we conclude by asserting that we must continually reinvent antiracist teacher learning and enactment with and for teachers grounded in local considerations of contexts and pedagogical specificity.

Last, although MCWC continues, and both of us work with other white people (as white professors in education programs—Shannon in New York and Zac in Tennessee) to better understand our own racialized identities and work for antiracist change in schools, classrooms, and communities, we note here that we too are unfinished.

Building Pedagogues: Nouns and Verbs

As highlighted in the final chapter of this book, we are never finished. This echoes the title of this chapter, an introduction to “Who We Are Becoming.” Our work is always unfinished and ongoing; we are always in the mess that centuries of white supremacy have wrought. Further, there are limits on our antiracist work, including the structural (e.g., teachers often have less power than administrators or policymakers, and we are always embedded in larger systems), the interpersonal (such as relationships we already have or assume we have), and the personal (e.g., our own fears).

And yet, our collective work strengthened us as teachers and as antiracist actors. We spent 2 years building our pedagogical selves together as co-learners and co-teachers. In this case, “building” functions as a verb: We engaged in the work of transforming ourselves, our identities, and our classroom and school spaces. RaceWork teachers were *doing* the work as they (and we) were becoming antiracist actors. In the process, RaceWork

teachers were positioned as racial experts—they were their building’s (as a noun) “expert” pedagogues on issues related to race and antiracism, even when they resisted this title or explicitly acknowledged its complications. Our book title thus names the shift RaceWork teachers made as they collectively found themselves in leadership positions for the first time based on their antiracist engagement. “Building pedagogues” reflects our broader pedagogical project—in both RaceWork and our current teaching—of supporting teachers to, themselves, be(come) teacher educators for other teachers in their buildings.

Building Pedagogues thus has two intertwined meanings. It contextualizes antiracist work in the locale of the schools and districts—the buildings—in which we work. And it emphasizes that this work is ongoing—building is an active labor. Antiracism cannot be passive; if we are not continually building community, ideas, and antiracist identities, we are implicitly endorsing our white supremacist status quo. The community that we built in RaceWork was a space that honored our experiences and expertises and emphasized learning—not just planning—together. We built, in other words, a collective that learned together. We centered our lived experiences (such as family and classroom stories), coupling them with sophisticated theoretical and historical work that did not simplify or call upon stereotyped tropes of race or whiteness. While this work was ultimately about enacting antiracism in our buildings for the sake of student learning, it started with us as educators who are always in the process of becoming.

To close this chapter, as the facilitators of RaceWork and the writers of this book, Zac and Shannon recognize that we have the power to frame RaceWork for you, the reader. And so, before turning to what we read together in the next chapter, we share some of what RaceWork teachers anonymously reported about our work together. At the end of the 1st year, one teacher said that RaceWork had provided “an approach to a huge, scary problem in an unscary, manageable way.” Another said that because of RaceWork, “I have had a lot more conversations with others but it has totally changed (in a good way) how I teach and talk to students.” A third said that she realized her “incredible power in my classroom to make change and impact students” and another that she is “not alone in my struggles with race issues in my school district.” Teachers found solidarity with each other and were supported in having tough conversations, “giving us the resource of each other,” even when it was hard or felt overwhelming. At the end of the 2nd year, a teacher reported that “this has completely changed how I teach in my classroom and how I view policies in my school” and another that “it has dramatically changed my approach to curriculum and families/students of color. It has helped me to have conversations with staff members.”