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**FROM MOVEMENTS TO MEDIA: EXPLORING WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY
DEVELOPMENT IN U.S. SOCIETY**

**A thesis submitted to Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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gripping. This project is inherently collaborative and I am grateful to everyone whose influence has been inextricably woven through it.

“It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly enculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.”

-Peggy McIntosh

“All our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity.”

-bell hooks

Introduction

Click: I was fourteen years old, sitting in the back of a minivan with three other girls while our friend's mom drove us to their family's lakeside cabin for the weekend. We were at an intersection in a part of central Milwaukee that looked nothing like the wealthy White suburbs that the minivan and its inhabitants were used to stopping in. The doors were quickly locked with an audible clicking noise and we giggled nervously to mitigate the apparent fear of danger that warranted the presumptuous and inherently racist action. One push of a button told us that, while sitting in a car in broad daylight, the appearance of the neighborhood and its occupants warranted discomfort-induced self-protection.

Growing up in one of the most segregated cities in America, the effects of racism hid in plain sight. Redlining, a government-sanctioned process to maintain racial isolation and hinder access to home ownership for Black people, in the 1930's determined the racial separation that still characterizes Milwaukee today. Anyone who has lived there long enough could probably look at a map and circle areas where Black, Latinx, and White people live, tell you which neighborhoods to avoid, and which suburbs host the best private schools. The connection between geographical location and demographics has become normalized, and enculturation into such a system might make a person think that the stringent race-based segregation is standard practice.

It is out of this tension between complacent acceptance and insatiable curiosity for knowing more and doing better that this project was born. It was bred from the struggle

between self-examination and the critique of other people and systems; asking “am I part of the problem?” while still pointing the finger outwardly. I wrote this thesis with gratitude for the opportunities that my upbringing provided me, coupled with angry criticism of the injustice that engulfs this nation and robs others of the same opportunities that I take for granted. I wrote from a privileged position as a middle class, educated young woman of mixed heritage with Whiteness visible enough to secure me substantial comfort and acceptance in a racialized world.

This project’s focus on contemporary manifestations of Whiteness and racial inequity enter a long-standing, complex conversation about race relations that is as old as this country. Though made particularly palpable in eras of slavery and Civil Rights, racial struggles in America continue to flow steadily through the veins of this nation whether or not they make history books and headlines. The United States has been and still is plagued by racial injustice and Whiteness dominates every facet of modern society to systematically disadvantage People of Color. From housing to healthcare, education to criminal justice, and government to media, inequity is rampant.

Because of this reality, current manifestations of racism must be understood and addressed on structural levels, and to do so successfully, White individuals must realize the obligation to explore their own racial consciousness. As perpetrators of well-masked systems of injustice, they must look beyond obvious interpersonal racism and deeper into the societal platforms and practices that afford them such inescapable benefits. Individual White racial identity development leads to racial consciousness that is characterized by understanding privilege, institutional inequality, and the White-centered hegemonic

messages that society promotes. This personal and collective development has grave implications, as the safety and wellbeing of People of Color in this country is inextricably linked with our national willingness to recognize and dismantle both individual prejudice and state-sanctioned systems of inequality. This project implores people to commit to greater societal consciousness, one that begins with individual racial consciousness, is amplified by understanding movements and racial justice work led by People of Color, and is maintained by consistently and creatively challenging messages from media and dominant power structures that promote racial inequity.

I. Whiteness and White Racial Identity Development

Key Terms

The scope of White Privilege in the United States is almost inconceivably vast, spanning from police relations and gentrification to beauty standards and cultural appropriation. White Privilege is as pervasive as it is damaging. In the historic article from 1989, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” scholar and activist Peggy McIntosh defined White Privilege simply as an “invisible package of unearned assets” that Whites can count on “cashing in” daily (McIntosh 2). Some of these assets include seeing people of your race on television, not being followed in stores, and not having to explain racism to a 10-year-old for fear of their safety. Many scholars concur that obliviousness and invisibility are key features of privilege; Whites “typically remain unaware” of the benefits they receive in society, and therefore take them for granted (Horowitz 894; Niehuis 481; Bonds 716). In other words, White Privilege goes unnoticed by those who have it, but is more visible to those who do not.

When terms such as “privilege” and “unearned assets” are considered without context, they may seem appealing or even positive. However, the invisible package sounds more enticing than what it really is: a system of dominance and control mechanisms. McIntosh recognizes the importance of such language and adds that while this privilege sounds like something to be desired, it actually works to “systematically over-empower certain groups,” causing thoughtless and harmful actions (McIntosh 9). This project will explore the ways in which issues associated with Whiteness and White Privilege contribute to social divisiveness, misrepresentation in the media, and

incomplete understanding of racial identity. Prior to examining these concepts, it should be noted that the use of capital letters used in the term White Privilege is intentional and utilized here as a way to denote its scope and prevalence, and to encompass the multitude of concepts that exist underneath it, some of which will be defined below.

There are several core principles that serve as both effects of and catalysts to White Privilege. The first is the well-crafted notion that in the United States, White is the norm. As academic and film critic Richard Dyer bluntly states, “Whites are not of a certain race, they are just the human race” (Bonds 717). This notion is reiterated in every facet of our society, whether people notice it or not. Let us consider common household items, for example. Standard Band-Aids, which are marketed as being flesh colored, do not come close to matching most skin tones. Parents with children of color often endure the frustrating experience of seeking out brands such as Tru-Colour and Ebon-Aide, which were created to fill an obvious gap in the bandage market for consumers with darker skin (Wade). Another famous example is Crayola Crayons and their skin colored shades. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s encouraged Crayola to change the name of a crayon from “flesh” to “peach” in 1962. However, it was not until 1992 that Crayola came out with their “Multicultural Crayons” pack after succumbing to pressure from educators and consumers to feature a wider variety of skin tones (Crayola). These are just two of countless examples that can be cited to denote how Whiteness exists thoughtlessly as the societal standard.

The White race is so dominant, so normalized, that when discussing race, the term is used almost exclusively to describe non-Whites. Robin DiAngelo, scholar and author

of the widely acclaimed book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race*, confirms this sentiment by adding that “White people are just people” (DiAngelo 59). They escape any need for clarification or intersectionality: saying “that guy” does not need the qualification of identifying his race. Alternatively, non-Whites are constantly racialized; “my Black friend” or “my Asian cousin” ensures that non-Whites only represent their respective race, whereas the White experience is universalized. This is emblematic of White transparency, a term that encapsulates the lack of racial consciousness that is at the core of each concept related to Whiteness in this chapter. It is the power and privilege that dismisses White people from having to think about any “norms, behaviors, experiences, or perspectives” that are specific to Whites (Lietz). This transparency constitutes White people’s ability to evade racial consciousness by assuming that Whiteness is the standard unless otherwise noted.

When Whiteness is the assumption, any deviation from the socially constructed norm is considered disruptive to the status quo. Whites have been taught that their perspectives are “objective and representative of reality,” and therefore everyone should adhere to that reality (McIntosh cited in DiAngelo 59). This is exemplified in many ways, one example of which was found in a study by Sydel and Nelson, conducted in 2000, where White college students believed that Black students self-segregated and should “de-emphasize their ethnicity” in order to fit in with everyone else. In this context, fitting in “means accepting the status quo of White Privilege” (Horowitz 701). This is White privilege in action; “otherizing” individuals and groups of people for not making the effort (one that Whites do not have to make) to assimilate and belong.

Although White perspectives do not objectively represent everyone's reality, McIntosh and DiAngelo suggest that dominant societal rhetoric says otherwise. White experiences dictate societal norms and the status quo, which has ultimately made White synonymous with good. DiAngelo argues that the absence of people of color in White people's lives "is what defines their schools and neighborhoods as 'good'" (DiAngelo 58). When discussed among White folks, "good schools" and "good areas" are code for White spaces. This explains the tendency for concerned suburban mothers to lock their car doors while at stoplights in Black or Brown neighborhoods; a disruption of their norm, even in terms of passing through different communities, turns quickly into discomfort, per the introduction to this project. It also leads to less harmless actions, such as White flight. This refers to Whites migrating (typically from the city into suburbs) to escape and avoid the influx of people of color into "their" spaces. When "good" schools and neighborhoods are tarnished by people who do not fit in, Whites tend to pack up and leave.

The key terms that have been presented thus far all exist because of the reality that White people are rarely forced to confront their own racial identity. Unfortunately, when faced with information or situations that disrupt this reality, White people commonly respond with White fragility, a term that DiAngelo defines as "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (DiAngelo 54). This concept is based on the idea that White people in America are typically immune to discussing race; they exist in an insulated social environment because they simply have not had to build the skills or stamina that would

allow for “constructive engagement across racial divides” (57). In other words, they do not have to think or learn about race as a social construct, and when they are forced to confront such topics, often react defensively.

To understand this concept more concretely, the author offers a personal example of an encounter with White fragility. Once while DiAngelo and a team of interracial colleagues were co-facilitating a workplace training on anti-racism, a White participant left the session after receiving constructive, sensitive feedback on how several of her comments affected the People of Color in the room. Shortly after, DiAngelo and her co-trainers were informed that this woman was incredibly upset by the feedback and “might literally be having a heart attack”. The woman’s co-workers clarified that they did mean a literal, life-ending heart attack (65). The woman, of course, did not have a heart attack, but her reaction provides an opportunity to dissect White fragility in action. This White woman (along with her entirely White staff) was not accustomed to discussing race, nor being challenged when doing so. The facilitators’ feedback caused racial stress in an amount that was intolerable to her. It thus triggered defensive moves, which were to escape the situation and tell others that she may have a heart attack as a result of the racial stress. DiAngelo does not mention the effect of the woman’s reaction on other participants, but it is apparent how the woman’s fragility affected the potential learning experiences of others. In this situation, instead of improving from criticism, discussions on race were considered damaging and dangerous to wellbeing. Furthermore, since the facilitators were interracial and the company’s staff was not, this situation ruined an

opportunity for “constructive engagement across racial divides” (57), essentially missing the point of training this all-White staff.

Author Joseph E. Flynn Jr. argues that White fragility is a form of resistance; the flight, fight, or freeze response to something as harmless as a mandatory workplace seminar offers a bleak forecast for race and privilege progress in America. But let’s assume that most perpetrators of White fragility have almost never discussed race or privilege before. If we consider a population with more education on the subjects and even a basic consciousness of how racism operates in America, we should be in much better shape, right? Not necessarily. Another relevant sub-topic of Whiteness and privilege is a concept called White fatigue, which is “a temporary state in which individuals that are understanding of the moral imperative of antiracism disengage from or assume they no longer need to continue learning about how racism and/or White privilege function” because they already have a simple, individualistic understanding of the issues (Flynn 117). In other words, it is the tendency for Whites to believe that they are done learning about racism once they acknowledge its existence in basic, often interpersonal interactions, and their subsequent reactions to this view being challenged. Flynn identifies several reactions, including impatience, sarcasm, frustration, and resignation that White people exhibit when race and privilege are brought up around them (117). To be clear, these reactions occur when White people are informed that racism must be examined more critically and on an institutional and systematic scale, something that they have not studied to the necessary extent. Unfortunately, rather than

digging deeper into this pervasive issue, they might roll their eyes and say, “I get it, let’s just stop talking about racism already.”

White fatigue is a distinct voice in the greater conversation on privilege and race because it identifies a population who may be further in their learning than, for example, the woman in DiAngelo’s example of White fragility, but are not inclined to continue the learning process. It begs the question of why they choose to truncate their engagement with these issues and how to address this trend. In reality, most of the key issues related to White Privilege and racism stem from ignorance. As previously mentioned, most White people in the United States are not forced to confront race or their own privilege and the lack of desire or resources to learn. As a result, a large portion of the U.S. population does not understand racism, White Privilege, or their complicit role in perpetrating those systems of oppression. Because of this widespread phenomenon and its damaging effects, White people must confront this issue beginning on an individual level.

To understand race in the United States on an individual level implies developing racial consciousness and racial identity, which the following section will examine and categorize. However, the importance of studying these topics is not for personal self-fulfillment, rather it is to comprehend how individuals contribute to systemic and institutional manifestations of race. Race is ultimately a social construct; it is beyond the scope of this project to assert that the societal construction of race accounts for more of the differences among humans than biology does, but the following explanation operates under this assumption. Over time, the United States has built its systems and institutions in a way that benefits those in power; namely, White people. Structural racism refers to a

system in which “public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms” work together to perpetuate racial inequity in society (“11 Terms”). Racism is social, political, and economic in nature and reveals itself in schools, housing markets, prisons, the healthcare system, and in many other visible and subtle facets of society. It systematically disadvantages People of Color and privileges White people in ways that may seem insignificant, such as McIntosh’s ability to not be followed in stores, but it is precisely these daily experiences that result from invisible, historical structures of inequity. It is important to grasp the scope of racism prior to proposing the importance of individual racial identity development, as it has little value without societal context.

White Racial Identity Development

To identify and follow this learning process, several White Racial Identity Development models have been created to classify how Whites understand racism, Whiteness, and the societal construction of racial differences. Such models provide the framework with which to assess individual progress and societal trends. The model that has been selected for the purpose of this project is Helms’ White Racial Identity Development Model (WRID). The WRID Model was developed by researcher and psychologist Janet Helms in 1990. It is the most researched and widely cited model of its kind and has been used for decades to understand race, Whiteness, privilege, and individual participation in these systems. The WRID model is a developmental process created with the goal of “abandonment of racism and evolution of a nonracist White identity” (Helms cited in Trusty, et al. 67). The model posits Whites as individuals who

have a responsibility to understand the systemic nature of Whiteness, racism, and their respective roles in those systems.

Before introducing the WRID model and related examples, there are several criticisms of Helms' framework that are worth noting. The first is that despite the linear appearance and concise categories depicted below, learning about and understanding racism is not a clean-cut linear process. This is the model's biggest critique: it appears as though someone can research a few facts, verbally acknowledge their ignorance, and declare themselves as moved on to the next step. Needless to say, that is not how this model looks in practice. The thresholds between stages are permeable, and White people will likely display traits of more than one at once or might skip steps altogether (Malott 334; Flynn 120). Furthermore, many have argued that the model is too conceptual and lacks the concreteness and evidence to allow Whites to find themselves in the development process (Malott 334). In other words, Whites may struggle to identify with the various stages, as well as with finding tangible ways to progress.

Lastly, critics argue that as Whites get closer to autonomy status (the final stage of the model), they develop a "positive racial-group association" which is a slippery slope into accepting Whiteness as an embodiment of privilege and superiority (Malott 334). Arguing that a healthy White identity is inherently impossible, some scholars do not believe that sufficient empirical evidence exists to warrant advocating for "autonomy" status, since it does not give enough direction as to what a nonracist, healthy White racial identity looks like in the world. To address this dangerous perception, the ideal goal of positive racial group association or racial identity is for Whites to see themselves as

racialized beings, instead of leaving race to the “others”. This challenges the aforementioned notion that White is the norm and race is for everyone else. The hope is that the WRID model will create a more systematic view of race and Whites can locate themselves within this complex, socially constructed system instead of being outside or on top of it. In the words of Janet Helms (cited in Flynn 120), when a White person reaches the final stage of the WRID model, they understand Whiteness as “part of a constellation of differences,” among races rather than apart from them.

Considering the opposing views that have contributed to the 28 year-long discussion of Helms’ WRID model, there are still valid reasons to use it. One reason is because it provides a framework which will be used to examine examples from contemporary media. The connections made between WRID stages and media stories use the structure and classifications of the WRID model without assuming that its simple, linear format determines the ease with which a White individual can develop their racial identity, nor do they attempt to create a prescriptive assessment of how to reach the autonomy stage. Additionally, the model will not be used for its original purpose of tracking an individual’s progression in understanding racism, but rather as an assessment of our country’s development and how that progress (or lack of) is communicated to the public through mainstream media.

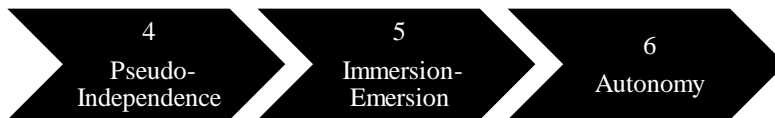
As a final disclaimer, one should not assume that all non-Whites inevitably understand the scope and effects of racism or their role in the system. Similarly, this model does not seek to imply that all White-identifying individuals choose to spend most of their lives in the ignorant first stages of racial identity development. Helms’ WRID

model seeks to generalize and categorize for the sake of progress and understanding, not for the sake of assumptions and blame. As is depicted below, the model itself consists of six stages that are divided into two distinct phases, or sub-processes of progression. Each stage will be briefly defined then examined alongside an example from contemporary media.

Phase One: Abandonment of Racism



Phase Two: Evolution of a Non-Racist Identity



Phase One: Abandonment of Racism

Contact

The first stage should be considered as the base upon which the rest of the model builds. It is characterized by obliviousness and naivety. Here, Whites do not critically engage with race on any level and operate under the belief that all people are the same because White is the norm and everything else remains unexamined. Whites in the Contact stage do not understand racism, Whiteness, nor their role in these systems, and

often view such concepts as irrelevant. Denial is also a determining factor of the Contact level: Whites deny that skin color makes a difference in societal treatment and their resulting privileges are taken for granted.

Disintegration

Disintegration occurs when denial of racial differences ceases. The shift into the second stage is primarily characterized by confrontation and realization. Such confrontation does not have to be hostile, rather it can be incited by increased exchanges with People of Color, exposure to new information about racism or privilege, or being presented with internal or external racial dilemmas. These confrontations can cause dissonance and therefore elicit feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety. Despite positive progress in moving from the first stage to the second, the aforementioned negative feelings may cause White people to avoid interactions with People of Color as they grapple with their new understanding of racial differences.

Preliminary recognition of racist thoughts and beliefs occur in the Disintegration stage and thus begins the learning curve. Racism is still considered on a shallow, obvious, and likely exclusively interpersonal manner. White Privilege may be recognized at surface level and may encourage Whites to seek comfort from one another during this stage of shock. Much confusion exists in this stage, but it is where Whites become “disintegrated” from their preexisting worldviews, perhaps without any intention of doing so.

Reintegration

Reintegration is complex in that it does not appear to be constructive progress, though it is a natural and necessary stage in the development process. Operating out of discomfort after receiving new information about race and Whiteness, people in this stage try to cling or “reintegrate” themselves into their status quo. Feelings of anxiety and guilt may develop into anger or attempted superiority over people of color, and feelings of social isolation often ensue. Additionally, victim-blaming is a common trait of the Reintegration stage because as Whites increasingly understand the effects of racial differences in society, they blame People of Color for those resulting issues. Whites will assert their dominance in order to dismiss internal dissonance and mitigate feelings of confusion over new information.

Phase Two: Evolution of a Non-Racist Identity

Pseudo-Independence

This stage, the first in the development of a non-racist identity, is characterized by individuals making an effort to understand racial differences and their effects. Whites in this stage recognize the existence of oppression and privilege, as well as some responsibility in addressing these issues. While they do not yet understand the systematic and institutional function of racism, individuals experiencing Pseudo-Independence are more likely to take action to engage with their new beliefs. This may be in the form of suppressing racist tendencies but still being guilty of covert racism, distancing oneself

from White friends, and seeking out new or improved relationships with people of color. This is a humanizing stage, though racism is still viewed through a fairly narrow scope.

Immersion/Emersion

Whites reach the Immersion/Emersion stage when they begin to grapple with questions of their racial identity, their role in racism, and the benefits they receive as being a White member of society. This stage requires commitment and an activist mindset as Whites see now see themselves as part of the equation. Allies enter the conversation at this stage as well. Whites experiencing Immersion/Emersion typically seek out White role models who do racial justice work in order to learn what it means to be an ally and how to handle their privilege. They recognize that everyone has a part in addressing this system of oppression and thus continue the process of self-discovery and knowledge acquisition in order to take action.

Autonomy

Autonomy: the final stage. White individuals who reach this status have developed a positive racial identity and understand the individual, systematic, and institutional functions of racism. They comprehend equity and oppression and take action in dynamic ways to address these social justice issues. “Autonomous” Whites have come to understand their own privilege through a challenging process of learning and self-examination. On an interpersonal level, their cross-cultural and multi-racial interactions and relationships are improving, and on a systematic level, they understand their place in the larger societal construction of race. Although White people who find themselves at this stage have shown commitment, learning, and vulnerability to get here, it does not

mean that their responsibilities are over. Because United States society has raised White people to be racist, unlearning that racism is a life-long journey. Whites who reach the Autonomy stage must stay committed to it by being activists, allies, and advocates.

The purpose of introducing key terms related to Whiteness and the White Racial Identity Development model is to provide a framework through which to analyze contemporary ways in which Whiteness and racial identity are manifested in society: namely, in social movements such as Black Lives Matter and through the media. In the following chapter, the White Racial Identity Development Model will be used as a framework to analyze White individual and collective responses to the Black Lives Matter Movement. This particular movement was selected for several reasons. It is a contemporary movement that has received extensive national and international attention. It is a grassroots organization whose tagline has been repeated and retweeted by activists, politicians, and celebrities. People in the United States have publicized both passionate support and fierce criticism of the movement, and the following chapter will analyze those responses in terms of White Racial Identity Development. In addition to its newsworthiness, the organization's online origins and dynamic social media presence allow for thorough media-related analysis, which will be discussed in the third chapter.

II. White Racial Identity Development and Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter Background

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement that began in 2013 with a simple online hashtag when three powerful Black female organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, responded to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012. Zimmerman's exoneration sparked conversation and movement surrounding the killing of unarmed People of Color by police and civilians. The creation of BLM is rooted in the issue of police brutality against Black and Brown people but has evolved as a movement with a wider reaching "ideological and political intervention" in a society where "Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" ("Herstory"). The movement affirms and uplifts Black people's humanity and resilience in the face of state-sanctioned violence against the Black community in the forms of mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, police brutality, gentrification, and other pervasively racist practices (Esposito and Romano 162). BLM aims to change institutional practices as well as the racist culture in which they exist.

The hashtag that started the movement, #BlackLivesMatter, has been widely used as a media platform and organizing tool, gaining national attention especially during the 2014 uprisings against police brutality in Ferguson, Missouri (Rickford 1; "Herstory"). The organization's powerful social media presence has helped to mobilize activists in

hundreds of marches and occupation-based protests across the country, using “creative disturbance” such as “die-ins,” mall occupations on Black Friday, and public rallies to preach their message (Hegg). Black Lives Matter is now a global network with over 40 chapters. The network’s power is non-hierarchical and works to center the voices of female, queer, and transgender people in order to challenge the historically heterosexual, cisgender, and male-dominated governance of social movements and society (“Herstory”). The movement aims for diversity, inclusivity, and change under the umbrella of racial justice and equality in U.S. society.

In the five years since its inception, the Black Lives Matter Movement has garnered a variety of criticism. One flaw that critics have pointed out is its decentralized structure; while BLM’s organizers use it as a tool to include, disseminate, and uplift diverse voices, there are two issues with the decentralized structure that leave BLM vulnerable to criticism. The first is that when violent acts have happened in the past, the entire movement is blamed due to the absence of prominent leaders. For example, when five police officers were killed in Dallas, Texas following a peaceful BLM rally in 2016 and three other officers were targeted and killed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana the following year by shooters who were supposedly motivated by BLM, the organization was wholly dismissed by those who believed that the tragic attacks were associated with BLM’s mission (Fernandez et al.; Blake). The second issue is that its lack of figurehead is confusing for Americans because they do not know who to associate with the movement or who to look to for the its specific goals, resulting in a general misunderstanding of the movement’s purpose that will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter (Blake).

Another widespread belief is that Black Lives Matter is equivalent to “let’s agitate against the police matters,” as former New York City Mayor Rudy Guiliani claimed in an interview with Fox News (Madhani). Critics such as Guiliani argue that BLM’s goal of calling out police brutality inherently puts a target on the backs of police and generalizes all officers as racist and violent, and Guiliani and many others cited the Dallas and Baton Rouge attacks as proof of this misconception.

The Black Lives Matter Movement has been characterized by many other negative labels such as an angry mob, exclusionary movement, hate group, and associated with the KKK, Antifa, and other extreme groups (Friedersdorf; Blake; Cohen). Lastly, critics denounce the movement’s self-proclaimed grassroots status by calling it “Astroturf activism”. This term refers to organizations that appear to be grassroots, but have deep pockets thanks to donations from celebrities, political leaders, and other major donors. Millions of dollars have been donated by contributors such as George Soros’ Open Society Foundations, the Ford Foundation, and Beyoncé and Jay-Z (Shaw; Herwees). Critics argue that having such a strong financial backing may give them too much power and detract from the organization’s ability to remain authentic to their original goals.

Mass media has both amplified and undermined Black Lives Matter’s efforts, fueling a variety of responses to the movement’s novelty, divisive criticism, and dynamic social media presence. Several of these widespread reactions in the media will be used as a case study to examine White Racial Identity Development in terms of how White people in the United States have grappled with BLM. Each stage of the WRID model will

be contextualized through recent, publicized media stories that cover White people's responses to Black Lives Matter in order to concretize the purpose of the WRID model and track how some of the key terms associated with Whiteness that were introduced in the first chapter appear in these cases. It should be noted that the importance of using media as a case study is intentional and multifaceted. As previously mentioned, using contemporary platforms as a means of expression offers a new lens through which to consider longstanding issues. Furthermore, media plays a significant role in United States society today, a concept which will be addressed at length in the third chapter through an introduction to relevant communicative theories and media literacy. The following examples from news-related media emphasize the usefulness of studying media as responses to and perpetrators of social justice issues such as racism and White Privilege.

Finally, concerning the White Racial Identity Development aspect of this analysis, although WRID would ideally be tracked through a White individual's personal progression, the recent national responses to BLM have provided a unique opportunity to examine a range of collective development. As such, this chapter seeks to challenge the popular notion that Black Lives Matter is exclusive and racially divisive by presenting the potential for individual racial identity growth and greater social understanding. The social media content and televised interviews used here portray the potential for White racial identity development through dialogue and the ability for White individuals to learn from situations of racial confrontation instead of responding defensively to them. Lastly, it should be noted that this analysis does not seek to dispute the value of the Black Lives Matter Movement or the content that it promotes, but rather uses responses to the

organization as a means of connecting issues of privilege and racism, the influence of media, and development of White racial identities.

Responses to Black Lives Matter & Corresponding WRID Stages

Phase One

One of the initial notable reactions to the Black Lives Matter Movement was the hashtag #AllLivesMatter (ALM), which claimed to preach equality of all people, therefore denouncing the perceived exceptionalism of the BLM. All Lives Matter supporters consider all people equally important and condemns the divisiveness caused by proclaiming that only one group's lives (Black people) matter. Critics, however, argue that #AllLivesMatter is a defensive reaction to a movement that aims not to make Black people exceptional to everyone else, but asserts that their lives matter too, despite what cases of police brutality and institutional racism suggest. Critics might also characterize ALM as White fragility, since many of its supporters reacted to the perceived insult to the worth of their lives instead of researching and understanding the legitimacy of Black Lives Matter's message. Many analogies have been drawn to explain the concerning difference between saying All Lives Matter and Black Lives Matter. For example, if a house was burning down, firefighters would not spray down the entire neighborhood, they would focus on saving the burning one. Or if someone went to the doctor for a broken arm, the doctor would not thoroughly check every bone in the body, they would treat the fractured one. This sheds light on the distinction between asking for recognition, and not preferential treatment.

Though no founders of the ALM movement have been named, the social media trend has been adopted by politicians, celebrities, and by people (of many races) in all levels of society as an online hashtag and rallying cry. This was publicized again by Rudy Giuliani who claimed while speaking on CBS' *Face the Nation* in 2016 that Black Lives Matter is "inherently racist" and "anti-American" ("Rudy"). He argued that the Black Lives Matter Movement has put a target on the backs of police officers and accused the movement of taking a minute percentage of crime in America (police murdering Black people) out of proportion, due to the rates of Black-on-Black homicide in cities such as Chicago. Not only does this response dismiss cases of racialized murders, but it places blame on Black people for inner city homicides instead of recognizing the systems and institutions that cause such marginalization and violence.

#AllLivesMatter was created as a defensive reflex to the challenge put forth by the Black Lives Matter movement. Critics argue that it exemplifies White fragility and failure to recognize the intentions behind the necessary reform that the Black Lives Matter Movement called for more than it works to unite people and recognize the value of all lives. While saying "All Lives Matter" sounds like a unifying call to shared humanity, it can be dangerous because it denounces the fact that Blacks in the United States face state-sanctioned violence and oppression and simply want recognition that their lives matter as well. By glossing over BLM's call to attention on specific issues, All Lives Matter supporters ignore an opportunity to learn about the racial injustice that has caused police brutality, mass incarceration, and other forms of oppression.

As such, the creation of the All Lives Matter movement exemplifies the first stage of White Racial Identity Development: Contact. The Contact stage is characterized by ignorance, naivety, and the denial that skin color affects social positioning and societal treatment. This is contextualized by the ways in which All Lives Matter supporters overlook the issues of racial injustice that BLM raises and instead dismiss the organization's cause and in turn, maintain the racial hierarchy. Saying "All Lives Matter" assumes that the United States is an egalitarian society where everyone is, and should be, treated equally; however, widespread evidence of racial discrimination contradicts ALM's equality-oriented rhetoric. Both All Lives Matter and individuals in the Contact stage deny the existence of racism and privilege and the need to address these pervasive issues. Supporters of ALM do not critically consider why BLM might be a necessary movement because they cannot see it as anything other than a threat to their White reality, which reflects White fragility, or defensive responses to racial confrontation, on a national scale.

One of the primary reasons that people support All Lives Matter is because it sounds egalitarian and inclusive; however, when individuals choose to listen to and learn from Black Lives Matter's messages, some have found that ALM is more ignorant than uniting. Numerous politicians, celebrities, and other outspoken social media users across the nation who verbally supported or used the hashtag #AllLivesMatter as it began to trend later denounced their endorsement and claimed to not have fully understood the implications of ALM. In terms of the WRID model, these individuals have begun to "disintegrate" themselves from fragile defensiveness and stopped denying the existence

of the racial inequalities that Black Lives Matter addresses, which include the fatal shootings of unarmed Black people by police officers and their subsequent acquittals, and fights against targeted criminalization of People of Color that contributes to mass incarceration. This progression played out with Hillary Clinton in June of 2015, when she said the phrase “all lives matter” while speaking about religion, racism, and education at a historically Black church only several miles from Ferguson, Missouri.

Her use of this phrase resulted in publicized backlash such as when Jason Pollock, famous filmmaker, entrepreneur, and activist tweeted: “Hillary Clinton, you went to a church in Ferguson to speak to the community and you say, “all lives matter?” YOU ARE CLEARLY NOT LISTENING” (Keith and Kelly). In responding to this controversy, Clinton’s team insisted that she had always been a supporter of BLM, as shown in a speech from the Ripple of Hope Gala in December of 2014 where she said “Yes, Black lives matter,” which preceded her announcement that she would run for President. Though this stance clearly fluctuated given her comments in the Missouri church, it did not take her long to start listening and solidify her position. Beginning only a month after this incident, Clinton embraced the Black Lives Matter Movement in her 2016 Presidential election campaign. First posting “Black lives matter. Everyone in this country should stand firmly behind it” on Facebook in response to a reporter’s question about structural racism, she continued by having the “Mothers of the Movement” on stage with her at the Democratic National Convention. These are Black mothers whose children have been killed by police brutality or Black-on-Black crime and now speak out against gun violence (Glanton). Criticism for these actions included backlash for not

honoring families of police officers who were killed while on duty. Despite the controversy, Clinton humanized the issues that the Black Lives Matter Movement represents through her involvement with “Mothers of the Movement,” and publicly supported BLM, often regardless of whether or not the organization’s members supported her.

Although this shift in Clinton’s stance occurred in the context of politics and thus might not be as authentically transformative if it were to happen outside of the spotlight, it is still worth considering in terms of the WRID model. White Racial Identity Development can help us understand Hillary Clinton’s tumultuous relationship with BLM and ALM by recognizing it as fluid movement between phases. By initially shifting from Contact to the Disintegration stage, Clinton embraced how her naïve comment was challenged. This aligns with the second stage’s characteristics of individuals experiencing confrontation and realization, typically as a result of exchanges with People of Color, intrinsic or extrinsic racial dilemmas, or the acquisition of information about racism or privilege. In this case, Clinton’s initial use of the phrase “all lives matter” caused people to confront her via social media as a result of the external racial dilemma she created. Like many others, it appears she realized that saying “all lives matter” was not a uniting, peaceful slogan, but rather a silencing, divisive one for certain people. As such, Clinton embraced BLM, understanding that it in fact complemented her “Stronger Together” campaign slogan and calls for justice and unity instead of negating these demands.

Although this progression showed signs of Disintegration, Clinton moved beyond the second stage and into Phase Two of the WRID model, Evolution of a Non-Racist

Identity, by embracing BLM as much as she did in this specific example. Displaying an understanding of systemic racism and privilege through her engagement with both the social justice issues and diverse groups who were raising awareness of the issues, Clinton took action steps to publicize this progression and invited others to join her movement. Despite civic pressure and the political tendency to evade criticism on tough issues, the public watched her shift to a greater understanding of what it means to say, “Black Lives Matter”.

While Clinton displayed a willingness to develop her perspective, not all White individuals embrace the opportunity to change their perceptions of race and privilege. With this in mind, another widespread response to the Black Lives Matter Movement is the opinion that the organization is violent and militant. One vocalized example of this criticism occurred when conservative political commentator and former television show host Tomi Lahren publicly denounced BLM multiple times on Trevor Noah’s “The Daily Show.” Calling BLM protestors thugs and looters, Lahren claimed that she “lost respect for Black Lives Matter” after a Black man shot and killed five police officers in Dallas, “in the name of” the organization. Lahren also cited instances of violence in Baltimore, Ferguson, and New York City to support her disapproval of the movement. Even when Trevor Noah explained that “there is a distinction between the movement and the people,” Lahren went further by comparing BLM with the KKK. She cited protestors’ slogans such as “fry ‘em like bacon” and the notion that Black Lives Matter tells its people to “loot, burn, and riot” just as the KKK does (“Tomi Lahren”). Lahren defended

the idea that these instances encompassed the BLM narrative, not individual exceptionalism, as a justification for denouncing the entire movement.

This response to BLM exemplifies the third stage of White Racial Identity Development: Reintegration. This stage is inherently complex and problematic because it occurs after Whites have begun to confront race and Whiteness in a new way but still attempt to cling to their previously held status quo. While they may recognize that issues of racism and privilege exist, they do not yet understand their role in perpetrating that oppression. Reintegration is the stage in which victim blaming occurs; People of Color are blamed for the issues that they face, as was seen with arguments against Black-on-Black crime and protestors' violent actions. This argument mirrors Rudy Giuliani's aforementioned comment about how Black Lives Matter puts targets on the backs of police officers and disproportionately magnifies the issue of police brutality. In both of these cases, Lahren and Giuliani partially recognize the issues of violence and oppression against people of color by acknowledging their existence. However, both then allow several cases of BLM semi-related violence to speak for the entire movement and thus write it off as militant instead of recognizing the need for and accomplishments of the group. As a result, they seek to maintain their status quo of White dominance, which is a key characteristic of the Reintegration stage. Progression out of this stage would require a dialogue with Black Lives Matter or a desire to learn more about the movement by looking past the few violent individuals who have tarnished its name.

Phase Two

Turning to more accepting and positive White responses to Black Lives Matter and simultaneously moving into the second phase of Helm's White Racial Identity Development Model, "Evolution of a Non-Racist Identity," it is worth examining how White individuals view White participation in the Black Lives Matter Movement. One interesting case was reported in a *Splinter* article entitled "Dear White Friends: Here's how to support BLM without making it about you" (Meyerson). The featured person in the article, a White male activist named Max Geller, had dedicated his life to social justice and was quoted saying that he was "willing to sacrifice everything" he had for Black Lives Matter (Meyerson). One thing he sacrificed was his criminal record; Geller was arrested by police in riot gear who pressed his head and unarmed body into the pavement. This was shown in a picture that photographer Patrick Melon captured and posted on social media. Max's White friends who saw and commented on the photo glorified him. Some called him a "hero," "personal hero," and "brave," among many other declarations of worship, while others began raising bail money for Geller and his White friends who were arrested at the same rally (Meyerson). While there is nothing wrong with being proud of a friend (especially one so committed to social justice activism), the issue lies in their glorification of his action.

These responses serve as an example of the fourth stage of White Racial Identity Development: Pseudo-Independence. This stage is characterized by White individuals intentionally recognizing the existence of oppression and their privilege and accepting some responsibility in addressing these issues of justice. People in this stage begin taking

small action steps to engage with new information and beliefs. By commenting on the picture and voicing their support of his efforts, these White people are engaging with their recognition of oppression and privilege. They likely support the Black Lives Matter Movement and are aware of the justice issues it addresses, which prompted their praise of Geller.

However, based on the limited perspective granted through their comments, they have not yet attained a complete understanding of their racial identity. By positing Geller as a savior, they failed to recognize any of the Black and Brown people who, for the most part, have been doing this justice work longer and more arduously than any White ally. Furthermore, a friend of Geller's, Bob Weisz, accurately noted that "White people saw White people getting brutalized," which called their attention in ways that centuries of the dehumanization of Black people has not (Meyerson). As such, these commentators did not examine the privilege involved in Geller's arrest nor how their praise of him excluded vital historical voices. This addresses another important piece of the Pseudo-Independence stage, which is White individuals continued use of covert racism, portrayed here by failure to look critically at the implications of their comments. Though most people would not include these analyses in a Facebook comment, it is important to note how even the most well-intentioned and supportive White people fall short of contributing meaningful, inclusive insight.

One White individual who does offer valuable insight on issues of race and privilege is Samantha Bee, writer and host of television program *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. In July of 2016, Bee addressed White perspectives on Black Lives Matter

in a segment called “Most Lives Matter.” In this episode, she sent her diverse group of reporters, called “The Sam Squad,” to the 2016 Republican National Convention to talk to attendees about their views on BLM and the issues that the organization seeks to address. Initial thoughts on BLM from interviewees called the group “by definition, a racist group,” and “borderline domestic terrorism”. Nearly all of the thirteen featured interviewees proclaimed that “all lives matter,” though none of them could support their denouncement of Black Lives Matter with any knowledge of what the movement actually stood for and aimed to achieve.

Of the featured interviews, one man in particular had his feet firmly planted in the Contact stage of White Racial Identity Development; this state senate candidate refused to change his mind and verbally announced his disinterest in learning more about issues of racist police brutality, and BLM’s stance on it. Despite this seemingly stagnant perspective, most participants were willing to learn more about the Black Lives Matter Movement when asked. One White woman acknowledged that because of being in her “little White skin”, she has never been forced to confront racial realities. Yet instead of a defensive response to disrupting her comfort in avoiding such issues, she explained that she felt guilty due to a lack of racial knowledge and did not want to offend people of color through her interactions with them. Another White woman echoed this discomfort, stating that she got nervous saying Black and African-American because she did not know which term was preferred. In response, the Black female interviewer suggested that she simply ask a Black person to get their answer. This type of dialogue and encouragement by “The Sam Squad” aided in the progression of thought and perspective,

challenging the perceptions of the White interviewees in a setting where they would typically only be reaffirmed. As such, the featured interviews exemplified the fluidity and potential for movement in White Racial Identity Development.

In the context of this particular segment, Samantha Bee embodies aspects of the Immersion/Emersion and Autonomy stages featured in Helm's White Racial Identity Development Model. Before introducing the RNC clip, she commented on one of Iowa's Republican representatives, Steve King's, statement that White people have contributed "more to civilization" than "any other sub-group of people" ("Most Lives"). Joking that electing King seven times was "White people's contribution to civilization," she exclaimed "way to go, we rule!" ("Most Lives"). Despite this comical tone, Bee's use of the word "we" demonstrates an ownership of Whiteness that is echoed throughout the segment at the Republican National Convention.

This comment aligns with the ways in which individuals in the Immersion/Emersion stage understand their own White privilege and responsibility in addressing this system of oppression, which Bee does in other episodes of "Full Frontal" as well. In one segment called "White Plight," the host explicitly addresses White fragility. The episode features a news reporter's interview with Bo Bice, a singer who was called a "White boy" at a Popeye's restaurant. In response to this "racism" Bice ranted on Facebook, threatened to sue the restaurant, and got the Black female Popeye's employee suspended. Samantha Bee sarcastically yet accurately unpacked this situation by explaining that Bice's privilege was undeniable, he was not a victim of systemic racism, and he embodied White fragility at its finest. She even presented Robin

DiAngelo's definition of White fragility to educate her viewers on the accurate terminology that described his behavior.

Additionally, in the "White Plight" segment, Bee recognized that being called a White boy seemed to be Bice's first experience of "oppression" at 41 years old. She then called on Kevin, a Black colleague of hers, by asking how many times he had been discriminated against that day. Standing next to a White police officer who was writing a ticket, he answered "this is twelve, Sam" ("White Plight"). This comical bit contextualized Bee's understanding of privilege, systemic racism, and a commitment to educate others on these issues, all of which aligns with the Autonomy stage of WRID. Furthermore, Bee's "Sam Squad" is a diverse group of people who are given a voice through reporting for her show, not just as gatherers of information, but as educators, advocates, and activists. Bee uplifts and credits their important work, and these positive multi-racial relationships are another key characteristic of the Autonomy stage. Overall, these segments of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* exemplify Bee's commitment to diversity, understanding of and education on privilege, racism, and individual's roles in systems of oppression.

While Samantha Bee's "Most Lives Matter" and "White Plight" clips provided appropriate examples of the latter stages of the WRID model, it is important to offer a disclaimer about associating someone with the Autonomy stage. As previously mentioned, no White person perfectly understands their Whiteness, completely unlearns racism, and constantly engages in constructive activism. The Autonomy stage is idealistic in nature (both for White people and those of other races), so even individuals who

achieve positive racial group identity must continue to be critical thinkers, learners, and activists. White people such as Samantha Bee are contributing to the conversation about and education on White privilege, racism, and other important social justice issues, but they need not be glorified for their actions. Such engagement is admirable but prioritizing it over the work of People of Color who lack the privilege of televised recognition is an undesired risk.

III. Understanding Hegemonic Narratives Through Media Literacy

After examining the previous media examples through the lens of the White Racial Identity Development Model, it is also necessary to focus on the media itself. To do so, this section will begin by identifying several prevalent issues in the media related to BLM protest coverage and reinforcing hegemonic ideals of Whiteness and conformity. These media messages affect public opinion, and media literacy is a primary reason that audiences are not more critical to the messages they receive. The second section will focus on the importance of media literacy and its goals and functions, which will be discussed alongside several key concepts and theories related to how media is constructed and how audiences consume it. The final section will look to media literacy as a solution to public misunderstanding and negative biases toward BLM. Each component of this chapter supports the claim that media does not offer audiences unobstructed access to news events; rather, as with any form of communication, the medium is as important to consider as the message (McLuhan). Messages are affected by institutions, given meaning through strategic framing, and filtered for a particular audience in societally acceptable ways.

Whiteness and Protest Paradigms in Media

Communication research since 1981 has revealed that mass media's coverage of social protests effectively marginalizes the protest groups who are challenging "the prevailing power structure" (Gitlin et. al as cited in McLeod and Hertog 297). Media is powerful in its ability to shape public opinion, which often results in reinforcing hegemonic ideals and disparaging dissenting people and ideas. Mass media's reports on protest have been widely studied and revealing of a "protest paradigm," or predictable framing tactics that undermine social dissent, marginalize protest events, and belittle protest participants (McLeod 1). Public acceptance of this paradigm can contribute to unfavorable perceptions of the groups involved and divert attention away from the original motivations for and goals of the protest. While this paradigm is not apparent in every news story about social demonstrations, decades of research suggest that mass media's tendency to marginalize groups is overwhelming and affects public opinion.

Understanding the media's tendency and ability to dissuade the public away from a complete understanding of social protests and protestors is vital to crafting one's own informed perspective on social movements. To contextualize the assertions about protest coverage and reinforcing hegemonic ideals, this section will return to using Black Lives Matter as a case study. Relevant research on Black Lives Matter and protest coverage includes Meredith Bennett-Swanson's study entitled, "Media Coverage of Black Lives Matter," where she used U.S. newspapers published over a three-year span to collect data on how each state covered the Black Lives Matter Movement and the related socio-political topics with which BLM engages. Results suggested that newspapers covered the

“Dallas Police shooting” that occurred at a BLM rally more than they reported on fatal shootings of Black people, which is one of BLM’s primary purposes for protesting (Bennett-Swanson 104, 123). This data implies that media coverage was more focused on the movement and events themselves rather than the context in which they were occurring or motivations behind the group’s actions.

Such selective media coverage of social protests and movements denies audiences important background information which inevitably affects public perception of the protest group. This was apparent in the coverage of the Dallas police shooting and revealing of the effects of mass media coverage of protests. The shooting of five Dallas police officers in July of 2016 was mentioned in the previous chapter when Rudy Giuliani and Tomi Lahren cited the event as one reason to denounce the Black Lives Matter Movement, echoing the prevalent claim that BLM is violent and dangerous. The deadly attack occurred following a BLM rally in Dallas was a result of racially-motivated hatred and, allegedly, the desire to get “payback” for police killings of Black people (Fernandez et. al). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the shooter was at all associated with or motivated by Black Lives Matter as an organization. Although most news sources clarified that he acted alone, the incident is still widely associated with or even a called a result of Black Lives Matter (Karimi et al.; Bruton et al.; Achenbach et al.) The purpose of analyzing this coverage is not to demean the tragedy that occurred in Dallas or suggest that it should have been discussed less. Rather, it is worth analyzing considering the ways in which media coverage of the event marginalized Black Lives Matter and diverted attention from their organization and goals.

The tendency to misrepresent or divert attention away from protest groups' goals and intentions is reflected in the general public lack of knowledge of Black Lives Matter. In the aforementioned episode of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* where reporters interviewed attendees of the 2016 Republican National Convention, it was obvious that many of them were unfamiliar with the Black Lives Matter Movement and its purpose but dismissed it without seeking further information ("Most Lives Matter"). A Pew Research Center study from May of 2016 confirmed the widespread lack of information about the movement and its goals, with approximately 34% of people who have "heard at least a little" about BLM stating that they do not understand the movement's goals. Additionally, approximately 22% of Americans "oppose the movement" and 30% have never heard of it (Horowitz). More recent data suggests increased opposition; a Harvard-Harris study from August of 2017 found that 57% of Americans have an "unfavorable view of Black Lives Matter" (Easley). There has not been a correlation stated between the Dallas police shooting or any other specific event and the majority's increased negative perception of BLM yet overall, this data is congruent with the protest paradigm and its ability to limit public understanding of protest groups and encourage unfavorable perceptions of them.

The previous evaluation suggests that mass media affects public opinion and marginalizes protestors; one reason that this is done is to maintain power structures and cultural normalcy. One notable aspect of the status quo that media preserves through protest coverage is Whiteness. Research has revealed trends that differentiate outcomes of predominantly Black protests and predominantly White ones, a historically rooted

pattern that has been visible since the Civil Rights Movement. Mainstream U.S. society has a long, repugnant history of attacking peaceful Black protestors both through physical assault and rhetoric that justifies blaming them instead of understanding their cause. One example of this occurred in early May of 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama when Black citizens peacefully marched through the streets to demand racial equality. They were met with firehoses and police dog attacks, hundreds were physically injured and many more were arrested. Media coverage of this event failed to capture the violent police brutality. On May 4th, 1963, a *New York Times* headline read “Violence Explodes at Racial Protest in Alabama,” a *Los Angeles Times* headline was, “New Alabama Riot: Police Dogs and Fire Hoses Halt March,” while the local *Birmingham News* front page stated, “Governor Wallace Deplores Mixed Demonstration” (Cornish). These articles largely excluded causes for demonstrating, ignored Black people’s experiences and peaceful methods, and instead focused on what occurred at the event itself.

Unfortunately, more recent examples show that trends in Black protest coverage have not changed much. As Trevor Noah asked Tomi Lahren on *The Daily Show*, “what is the right way for a Black person to protest in America?” (“Tomi Lahren”). Black Lives Matter protestors are called “thugs” and frequently arrested, and when athletes silently take a knee during the national anthem, they are deemed unpatriotic and disrespectful to the nation, military, and American flag (Yan and Ford; Allen; Helmore). U.S. President Donald Trump called Colin Kaepernick, the first NFL player to kneel during the anthem, a “son of a bitch” and encouraged the NFL to fire him (Serwer). When Black people gather peacefully to celebrate the anniversary of the end of slavery, known as Juneteenth,

police and security presence upsurges (Esiert and Dobson; Lowinger). Despite the peacefulness of protest methods or legitimacy of cause, these examples amplify Trevor Noah's argument that there seems to be no right way for a Person of Color to protest in the United States without being called names or attracting police presence.

These instances have been compared to responses to and coverage of predominantly White protests, such as the "Unite the Right" protests in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017. White nationalists gathered, deadly violence broke out, yet there was minimal police interference and only three arrests (Helm). President Trump responded to the racially motivated violence by condemning the "egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence *on many sides*" (Merica; Emphasis by author). Other examples of prejudice in protest coverage include the "Oregon Standoff," which many say would have received much different coverage if protestors were People of Color, considering the tense situation in which armed militiamen occupied a federal headquarters in January of 2016 (Lopez). Many people also cite the 2017 Women's March on Washington as an example of White Privilege, seeing as there were zero arrests and minimal police presence among the millions of women that took over streets and cities across the nation following President Trump's inauguration (Sandler; Dastagir). This brief list of recent examples does not do justice to the substantial body of research on the topic, but it offers a glimpse of how the protest paradigm in media coverage of protest can differ depending on which races are most represented. A study conducted in 2015 by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that 63% of Americans say that "protesting unfair government treatment" is always a good thing for the nation;

however, that statistic decreases to 52% when Black people are the ones protesting. Out of only White Americans, 67% agreed that protesting unjust government treatment is always positive, but only 48% maintained that stance when asked if the same were true if the protestors were Black (Cox and Jones). Decades of research have revealed patterns in mass media coverage of protest that marginalizes the groups challenging power structures; while this general trend remains apparent, the results of studies by PRRI and Harvard-Harris suggest a patterned difference in reporting based on which race makes up the majority of protestors.

Mass media coverage of racial protests, the prevailing narratives of deviance, and its effects on public opinion of groups such as Black Lives Matter posit media as a significant problem. To more clearly understand what causes these negative effects as well as what potential solutions are, we must turn to media literacy. Poor media literacy among the United States' general population allows paradigms of racially biased media coverage to affect public opinion with little resistance. Media literacy will be defined and discussed in the following section in order to suggest that lacking these relevant, useful skills can result in an indiscriminate acceptance of problematic messages such as those surrounding protests and Black Lives Matter.

Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to the ability of media users to engage a “discriminating responsiveness” to what they see, read, or hear in the media (Ramasubramanian 252). This responsiveness includes users' abilities to process, question, analyze, and decode

media, which help to build a more conscious approach to watching the news, using social media, or participating in any other form of media (Scharrer 172; Draper et. al 14).

Applying these skills can be as simple as checking the source and date of the article that a friend shared on Facebook, or more involved, such as exploring how televised advertisements promote heteronormative gender roles. Considering how relatively new the presence of online and social media is in society, media literacy is a developing field with an increasingly important role to play in the world.

The goals and purpose of media literacy go beyond simply fact-checking viral news stories by recognizing the influential role that media has in the modern world. The Center for Media Literacy claims that media literacy helps consumers better understand the various roles that media plays in society, and simultaneously builds “skills of inquiry and self-expression” that are vital for people in a democracy (Dunlop 3). This implies that media literacy enables people to build personal skills, better understand society as a whole, and thus engage more actively in the systems of which they are a part. Furthermore, regardless of what type of media is being studied, literacy skills aim to be universally applicable. They are “constants” and “central tools” (Jolls 68) in the process of analyzing and constructing communicative messages, whether it is a Disney movie or political article being scrutinized.

Another important function of media literacy skills is the way it invites audiences to consider the media’s role in rationalizing and promoting “existing norms and expectations” (Ramasubramanian 252). This aspect is particularly relevant to this project, as the concepts discussed in the first chapter are all rooted in pervasive normalization of

the White experience. Media users must first understand what these existing norms or hegemonic ideals are, which might include Whiteness, civil obedience, and cooperation with governmental power structures. These norms can then be identified in the media's agenda and perhaps separated from protesting individual or group's goals, or the issues being protested. To explore several key aspects of this critical process, the following section will introduce some of the core aspects of media comprehension and communicative theories that shape both how media is constructed for audiences and how media users select their sources and understand messages.

Media Construction

Creating mass media content requires a process of filtering, focusing on, and amplifying various aspects of the news event and its accompanying message for a particular audience. This development creates a media agenda that affects how messages are presented and received which, as the previous sections demonstrated, has the power to affect public opinion. One concept under the umbrella of media literacy education that helps media users understand this process and its effects is the Agenda-Setting Theory, which includes the crucial component of framing. The Agenda-Setting Theory refers to mass media's ability to tell its audience not what to think, but "what to think about" (McCombs and Shaw 379). It relies on two basic assumptions; the first is that media does not simply reflect reality, rather media filters and shapes reality such that the public agenda is an effect of what media has encouraged them to care about (McCombs and Shaw 380; "Mass Media"). In other words, news stories are not delivered in an exact

chronology or by the number of people involved in the event; the goal is to capture audience attention, so certain stories receive minimal coverage and are accompanied by a briefly displayed photograph, while others are framed by “breaking news” headlines and are the highlight of the segment. The second assumption expands on the first by asserting that since mass media cannot focus deeply on every possible issue, the topics on which it chooses to concentrate are perceived as more important than those that were excluded (“Mass Media”; “Agenda Setting”). The notion that media affects the consumers’ perception of the world may seem obvious to some and invasive to others, but the reality is that the various aspects of the Agenda-Setting Theory play a role in the construction of media delivered messages, and subsequently our understanding of what is important and worth thinking about.

One of the most important concepts under the Agenda-Setting Theory is framing. Framing refers to the selection of a limited number of “thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda” when discussing a specific topic or issue (McCombs and Shaw 381). Framing is an inevitable process in media production and delivery, one used to set the media agenda. However, the exclusive nature of framing goes beyond agenda setting’s ability to tell the audience what is important to think about because it also “transfer[s] the salience” of particular qualities to the topics being discussed (382). In other words, whomever is covering news content, such as a journalist, television show host, or news reporter, will unavoidably select, emphasize, exclude, and elaborate on some aspects of the respective subject more than others (Hsiang and McCombs 24). This

allows for the presentation of one news event to occur in a myriad of ways, depending on which attributes have been made notable.

To elaborate on and contextualize the concept of framing, it will be applied to the coverage of a news event that was discussed in the previous chapter, which was Trevor Noah's interview of Tomi Lahren on *The Daily Show*. This exchange excited both Noah's liberal audience and Lahren's conservative followers and received significant coverage in the media. With headlines such as Stephanie Merry's article in the *Washington Post*, "Trevor Noah and conservative Tomi Lahren go head-to-head on Black Lives Matter on 'The Daily Show'" or Laura Bradley's article published in *Vanity Fair*, entitled "Why Trevor Noah and Tomi Lahren's Debate Was Such a Big Deal," the media widely reported on the event (Merry; Bradley). These succinct headlines exemplify how using different frames communicates distinct interpretations of the interview to readers. The *Washington Post* article title focused on the combative nature of the discussion by saying that the two went "head-to-head," and illuminated specific content, focusing on Black Lives Matter, and thus excluding the other topics that were covered in the 26-minute-long interview (Merry). In contrast, the *Vanity Fair* title primarily emphasized the importance of the event itself and secondarily framed the confrontational nature of the exchange by calling it a "debate," something traditionally marked by having winners and losers (Bradley). These two examples depict how the media agenda of covering Lahren's and Noah's exchange differed by making certain aspects of the event more salient than others.

To more fully understand the effects of framing, we must look beyond just the headlines and address journalistic coverage of the event itself. *Huffington Post*

contributor Michael Darer tackled some of the less popularly discussed facets of the event in his bluntly titled article, “Trevor Noah’s Interview with Tomi Lahren Is a Perfect Example of Why the White Liberal ‘Discourse’ Fetish Is So Damn Absurd” (Darer). The piece grapples with two related and important topics: framing (though the term is never explicitly used) in regard to how others have discussed Noah and Lahren’s exchange, and the content of that conversation which, in his opinion, reeked of White privilege and liberalism. Darer challenged mainstream media’s framing of the event as a discourse or debate when he suggested that equalizing Lahren’s privileged position on racial violence, how Black Americans can or cannot protest, and colorblindness with Noah’s views and experiences is inherently inequitable since there was no legitimate discourse, just stubbornly racist White conservatism on one side and an engaged interviewer on the other. His interpretation of the event and the media coverage surrounding it made the topics that Lahren and Noah discussed more salient and complex, rather than writing it off as another liberal versus conservative showdown.

While the nature of Darer’s article is controversial, it is revealing of how the various concepts presented in this paper can converge in context. The issue that Darer discussed was multifaceted; first, the content of Noah and Lahren’s discussion was troublesome because it was emblematic of White privilege, White liberalism, and extreme statements such as comparing Black Lives Matter to the Klu Klux Klan. Secondly, the substance of their exchange was muddled because it was framed as a “discourse” and “debate” (Leight). In headlines about their fierce battle and a notable focus on the importance of talking to one another, issues of racism and bigotry were

arguably not given substantial attention. The third aspect of the article that is relevant to this project is the focus on media criticism and looking past the headlines, a vital component of the type of media literacy for which this chapter advocates.

Media Consumption

Agenda-setting, framing, protest paradigms, and other lenses through which media messages are created offer a glimpse into what occurs behind the scenes before audiences turn on the nightly news or glance at article headlines. Until now, problematic media practices have been the focus of this chapter; however, recipients of media messages are a crucial component of why and how these messages are effective. Just as mass media is filtered and limited in nature, so too are the ways in which media users consume content. There are several concepts that are vital to understanding media consumption in the United States today. The first is selective exposure, which is defined as media users' "systematic bias in selected messages" that deviate from the collection of available messages (Arendt et. al 719). This is an inescapable consumer habit, considering how people get their information when a significant news story occurs. While it is not uncommon to check more than one source, rarely would someone read or watch commentary from every media outlet that reported on that story. This tendency is heightened when it comes to controversial issues, especially political ones. Considering today's technological, communicative climate, media users have the utmost control when it comes to how they want to stay informed. Research suggests that given how easy it is to customize what information users receive, (think Facebook friends, news apps on

phones, or who you follow on Twitter) selective exposure is becoming even more prevalent (Dylko 390). According to a 2016 study by the Pew Research Center, 72% of Americans get news from their mobile devices, which simplify users' ability to be updated exclusively by their desired sources (Mitchell et. al). This is not necessarily a negative trend since people are likely more informed if they have easy access to current news. However, relying exclusively on hand-picked news sources is inherently limiting and can therefore contribute to the more problematic elements of selective exposure.

Selective exposure is said to be motivated by defensiveness and the desire for accuracy. Accuracy motivations reveal that media users want to know the truth, despite how sheltering selective exposure may sound. A 2016 study by the American Press Institute revealed that accuracy was the primary factor for deciding whether to trust a news source or not, with 85% of the study's participants favoring it over other factors such as sources having the latest details on stories and concise, straightforward reporting ("What Makes"). The second motivation is defensiveness, which appears to be somewhat contradictory to the desire for accuracy. Defensiveness is rooted in the notion that individuals prefer to have their opinions validated rather than challenged (Arendt et. al 719). This is often referred to as confirmation bias and is another form of consumer selectivity that captures the tendency to be more invested in what is familiar and already a part of one's belief system (Wittebols 2). Confirmation bias makes people less receptive to dissenting information and can lead to ignoring or contradicting it (Wittebols 2; "Confirmation Bias"). Just as most people have at least several like-minded friends, so too will media users seek sources of information that reinforce their existing perspectives.

To put these concepts into context, let us consider the aforementioned “Most Lives Matter” segment from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. The segment featured Bee’s reporters interviewing attendees of the 2016 Republican National Convention on topics such as the Black Lives Matter Movement and race relations in the United States. This piece offers one simple way to consider selective exposure and confirmation bias by asking who the viewers were of Bee’s “Most Lives Matter” episode. It was filmed at the RNC and Republicans were being interviewed on topics that most politically engaged citizens have an opinion on, so theoretically, anyone who cares about race issues in America or politics could have watched the show to get informed on the topics. However, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* is an opinionated, liberal series, so the majority of her audience holds similar views because they want their perspectives to be affirmed by someone who reframes them in a comedic way. On the other hand, conservatives with views that mirrored those of the RNC interviewees would likely seek out an alternative source of information, one that confirms biases rather than mocking them.

Selective exposure and confirmation bias are two concepts that offer an alternative perspective on media literacy education by focusing not on institutional media practices, but consider instead how their audiences select and trust the messages that are being distributed. Both the constructive and consumptive sides of mass media are important and should be understood through media literacy education. To build on this chapter’s discussion on issues within the media, media literacy, and the communicative theories that media literacy education might encompass, the following section will

analyze specific functions of media literacy education programs and their various positive outcomes.

Media Literacy Programs

Considering the importance of understanding the role of media in the current United States society, it is important to ask what is being done to implement training and encourage media literacy skills among the national population. First, media literacy education is relevant and useful to people of any age. While there are often benefits to developing skills in young children, anyone from college students to experienced professionals can benefit from training that is up to date with the modern, information saturated society. As such, media literacy education can exist in a multitude of forms and well-documented programs include a non-classroom afterschool program for at-risk middle school students, a course for predominantly White suburban high school students, and curriculum for Latinx students at a community college (Draper et. al 14; Scharrer and Ramasubramanian 177). There are also global programs that are not limited to academic settings, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's trainings, which include online resources and international workshops for teachers and youth (Jolls 68; "Media"). These trainings are becoming increasingly widespread as media continues to influence society and becomes better understood by its users.

Media literacy programs can also offer general education or be focused on addressing a specific issue within the media. For example, there are youth programs aimed to analyze and resist messages that encourage drug and alcohol use, and

curriculum to help older students understand media's influence on racial and ethnic stereotypes (Draper et. al 13; Scharrer and Ramasubramanian 171). While this section will not provide a complete look into all available and potential applications of media literacy education, it is useful to note the wide scope of functions that the training can serve. For the purpose of this project, media literacy education that focuses explicitly on race will be briefly considered in order to show the potential for such programs to address topics of Whiteness, White Racial Identity Development, and other relevant concepts that have been discussed in this project.

Several pertinent studies examined how media users access and understand racial and ethnic stereotypes in the media. For example, studies cited in an article by Erica Scharrer and Srividya Ramasubramanian reveal that people as young as twelve years old can freely identify the ways in which media stereotypes People of Color and the effects that such depictions can have on White audiences' opinions towards and interactions with these groups of racially and ethnically diverse people (183). This study exposes the tangible implications of media messages, as they play a role in socializing people from a young age by presenting a problematically stereotyped script for people to follow. A more positive message is presented in a different article by Ramasubramanian, which suggests that media literacy training and introductions to counter-stereotypical media can reduce the typically automatic process of stereotype activation when presented with information or images of racial minorities (Ramasubramanian 260). While media can promote negative, pigeon-holed racial associations, media literacy works to reverse the process.

Racial and ethnic stereotypes in media have been the focus of even more nuanced media literacy studies, as evidenced by an article by Tara Yosso on Critical Race Media Literacy which revealed that seeing negative stereotypes about racial and ethnic minorities (in this case, specifically Chicano/as) motivated the participating students to challenge how media portrayed them through individual behaviors and actions. This was problematic in that they proposed an individual solution to a massively systemic issue, but the motivation and call to action were considerably more positive outcomes. Additionally, just as Scharrer and Ramasubramanian's research suggests that negative racial and ethnic stereotyping affects White people's perceptions of and interactions with the affected groups, Yosso's study highlights the necessity for White people to be involved in race-related media literacy education (Yosso). These studies, and ultimately the focus of this chapter, point to the desperate need for increased media literacy education in the United States. Whether a six year old watches racially stereotyped characters on television shows, or a young, politically engaged citizen misses out on opportunities for social protests because of fear-mongering on the news, or an international businessperson relies exclusively on one politically slanted news app on their phone, anyone who participates in modern Western culture can benefit from a greater understanding of how they comprehend and internalize the constant messages that try to grab our attention in this information-saturated society.

IV. Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this project is to reframe established concepts and connect them in new ways to contemporary media events in order to cultivate an interesting, accessible discourse that is relevant to the ways in which topics such as Whiteness, racial identity, and misinformation in the media manifest themselves in contemporary society. The implications for a greater public knowledge of these topics are tremendous. The safety of Black and Brown people in the United States is incumbent on a greater public understanding of how White individuals have been, and continue to be, taught to fear People of Color. This has been largely perpetrated by the media, whether it occurs when news channels mention the criminal background of a Black victim of police brutality or refer to Black Lives Matter protests as riots and protesters as thugs, media users must no longer consume this content indiscriminately. While this project was not exclusively focused on the media's fear mongering of People of Color, it is a crucial concept that White racial identity development and media literacy can help address.

One additional goal of this research is to advocate for the education of future generations and their socio-political engagement. With divisive political climates and increasingly accessible and customizable media, the need to develop young people's understanding of their relationship with media and society is crucial and time-sensitive. The relationship between being an engaged, informed citizen in a democracy and one's understanding of current news events and messages from the media is significant and

important. Therefore, media literacy education should be woven into school curriculum from the beginning of children's formal education in age-appropriate ways and continued through more official training programs in middle school and high school. Not every first-grade student must want to grow up to be a communication scholar or news anchor but developing an understanding of how to interpret messages from the world around them at a young age is vital to individual and societal progression in this nation.

Prior to looking ahead to future research that can advance this progress, several of the main claims and connections made in this project will be briefly summarized. The first chapter of this project examined the considerable need for White racial identity development in the United States, as it does not simply affect interpersonal interactions but has societal, institutional, and systemic implications. Looking to Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model and the potential for movement among its stages is a useful resource with which to classify various levels of racial consciousness for White individuals. The purpose that the WRID model serves for this project is to recognize what various levels of racial understanding might look like for White people, as well as encourage movement towards its final stages. It also provides a framework for showing how White Privilege and all of its facets work together and manifest in practice.

If a White individual were to embody the Autonomy phase of Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model, this person would understand their own privilege and how that impacts their life experiences, and put forth considerable effort to actively listen to, support, and work alongside People of Color. This White individual would understand the role of systems and institutions in perpetrating the racial oppression that

they seek to change. This person would recognize the role that People of Color have played in fighting against their own oppression for a long time, far before the term “ally” was coined and White activists joined in to support their struggle. The person would understand the importance of speaking with, not speaking for, and actively engages others in racial consciousness. Instead of responding with fear and fragility, this White individual could respond consciously when confronted with racial stress and understand that White is neither the norm nor the universal experience.

It is with this notion of the importance of individual understanding of race and racial identity that the focus shifted towards analyzing those concepts as they were represented in White people’s responses to the Black Lives Matter Movement. The focus on Black Lives Matter in the second and third chapters was selected to offer a contemporary manifestation of issues such as racial injustice, White individual and collective reactions to a race-oriented social movement, and problematic media coverage. The first of the three topics is engrained in the foundation of Black Lives Matter. Created in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and subsequent acquittal of his killer, the movement is rooted in the struggle for racial justice. The name of the organization alone sparked widespread responses for White people in the United States, ranging from the publicized, media-born assertion that “All Lives Matter” to White individuals acting as allies and respecting the wishes of BLM organizers.

The mixed responses to Black Lives Matter were captured in news headlines and coverage of their protests, often categorizing them as “riots” and dismissing the entire organization for the violent actions of a small number of protestors. These reactions and a

widespread misunderstanding of the movement's goals demonstrate two claims that are central to this project. The first is that when confronted with information or situations that are rooted in racial differences, White people should respond to the discomfort by asking questions, learning from People of Color, or even withholding judgment until they can process their own racial consciousness instead of reacting defensively and displaying White fragility. The second claim is that mass media's coverage of protests, especially when protestors are predominantly Black, often follows patterns that amplify the dissent at the expense of the protestor's goals, marginalize the people involved, and ultimately attempt to reinforce the hegemonic ideals that protestors are challenging. Communicative concepts such as agenda-setting and framing suggest that even a brief headline affects one's perspective on the topic itself and its importance, which demonstrates how the aforementioned media paradigms can influence public opinion. However, audiences also create opinions for themselves depending on their understanding of media messages and where they get their information. A media user's opinion on a topic such as Black Lives Matter will necessarily depend on their source; if someone who has never attended a BLM event thinks it is a gathering of angry, violent thugs to protest false injustices, it is likely because they selectively get information from news sources that confirm certain preexisting beliefs about race in America.

Perspectives like these, which were voiced by Tomi Lahren and Rudy Giuliani, are just one reason why media literacy is a vital tool in understanding society. This is not to say that Black Lives Matter should be blindly supported either; rather, promoting media literacy is a call to action for media consumers to question and analyze the

information that is presented to them, regardless of the topic. Media literacy skills invite media consumers to hold up a more critical lens to the information that is presented to them to accomplish goals such as developing individual skills and building a more systemic understanding of the media's role in promoting and rationalizing cultural norms. Media literacy education programs have accomplished these goals and many others and must continue to use their findings to encourage other groups and institutions to employ similar training for their students, constituents, and employees in order to create a more critically informed public.

Future Research

Considering the scope of topics that were addressed in this project, there are a number of areas that future research should address. First, Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model has been extensively studied and evaluated. Updated models such as Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson's White Racial Consciousness Model, which categorizes "commonly held racial attitudes" that White people exhibit toward people of color, have been developed as alternatives to Helms' focus on racial identity (LaFleur et. al 148). While the models themselves have been reassessed, the purposes that they serve have not been as substantially revised. Using Helms' and other models, future research should focus on what factors trigger movement among the various proposed stages. While recognizing that racial identity development is a non-linear process that reveals itself differently in each person, research should consider identifying events, social circumstances, interpersonal interactions, or exposure to new information that might spark racial development or openness to changes in previously held racial attitudes.

Gathering data of White individuals' specific responses to racial confrontation could also help pinpoint factors that encourage positive, progressive responses versus responding with White fragility or disengagement that might halt racial identity development. If such research is conducted, the proposed triggers should not be considered a prescriptive checklist for White people to complete to automatically become more racially conscious. Rather, the research would focus on effective means of encouraging racial identity and consciousness development by offering data instead of abstract classifications to understand how contemporarily held White racial attitudes function in society.

The second recommendation focuses on the future of media and people's understanding of it. As the societal influence of media continues to grow and be better understood, research surrounding media literacy must keep up. The studies that were cited in this paper, among many other well-documented cases of successful media literacy programs, offer a glimpse into why such programs are vital to people's understanding of society. As technology and access to media increases globally, future research should consider the prospect of making formal media literacy education programs mandatory in academic settings. Such courses would not necessitate a deep understanding of communicative theories or vocabulary, they should instead focus on age and situation appropriate material that helps develop a general understanding of concepts such as framing, selective exposure, and confirmation bias.

Fortunately, several state governments across the country recognize the need for such programs. According to an article in the Associated Press from December 31st, 2017, several states plan to implement media literacy education in their public schools in

2018 (Foley). Legislation to enact these programs passed with bipartisan support in Washington, Connecticut, New Mexico, and Rhode Island, but has received minimal national attention. Three more states are expected to consider similar bills in 2018 and are motivated by goals similar to those discussed in the previous chapter, such as being able to “tell fact from fiction,” and becoming more critical consumers in an information-saturated world (Foley). The states that have already passed or will pass legislation regarding state-wide media literacy education programs for K-12 students should be considered the standard for where all schools in the United States should strive to be in upcoming years. Future research should study the effectiveness of these mandatory media literacy programs in the public education system and make the data accessible nationwide. If the programs have the desired results, other states may be encouraged to propose similar legislation, mandate teacher training, or even create a federal budget for nationwide programs.

Future research should also consider how mandatory media literacy education could address important topics such as the ways in which media normalizes Whiteness, encourages racial and ethnic stereotypes, and represents victims of color. Previously mentioned research by Scharrer, Ramasubramanian, and Yosso revealed the importance of educating both White students and students of color on the role that media plays in promoting racial and ethnic stereotypes. While this content may not be easily deliverable to Kindergarten students, future research should identify manageable and understandable material for teachers and students to address these prevalent yet often ignored issues.

The final recommendation for future research is to explore how productive, inclusive dialogues on Whiteness and White Privilege can take place among the public, inviting both People of Color and White people to share expertise and experiences. Considering the creative, impactful ways that People of Color have used media as a tool to organize, advocate, and expose, future research should study how those efforts could engage a diverse audience more explicitly on topics surrounding Whiteness in the United States. The examples below suggest a gap among White people's desire to help end racial injustice, the best practices for doing so that are informed by People of Color's knowledge and experience, and lack of effective platforms through which to engage in this dialogue.

First, White people's efforts to unify and take action against racial injustice must be recognized, especially through formal organizations such as SURJ. Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) is a nationwide organization with chapters or affiliate groups in 46 U.S. states, Washington D.C., and Canada. The organization believes in "collective liberation" and that no one can be free until White supremacy has been terminated, which is done by focusing on racist institutions, economic equity, and shifting cultural beliefs ("About"). The organization, which is led by and made up exclusively of White people, is said to act as "training wheels" for Whites getting involved in racial justice activism by providing a space to learn about privilege and how to organize the White community while centering, supporting, and listening the work of People of Color (Friedman). SURJ, however, has received substantial criticism based on the belief that White people do not need "more spaces reserved for their comfort at the expense and exclusion of people of

color” (Delgado). Critics are skeptical of environments where White people are listening to and learning from other Whites on issues of racial inequality instead of the People of Color that have been fighting against it for far longer.

Organizations such as SURJ are motivated by the question, “What can we, as White people, do to help?” One woman, Chanelle Helm, a Black Lives Matter organizer in Louisville, Kentucky, answered that question. On August 13th, 2017, shortly after the “Unite the Right” protests that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, Helm wrote a list for her personal Facebook page which, after being modified slightly, was published three days later as an article in the *Louisville Eccentric Observer* (LEO Weekly) entitled, “White people, here are 10 requests from a Black Lives Matter leader”. As its title suggests, the piece was a list of ten things that White people can do to help in the fight against racial justice. Six of the recommendations were economically driven, such as suggesting that White people will or donate their property to Black and Brown families, especially ones “from generational poverty,” or reassessing monthly budgets to “donate to black funds” for buying land. Other advice focused on the workplace by encouraging White people to “get a racist fired” instead of ignoring their words and actions and being complicit. Helm concluded the article by urging White individuals to fight White supremacy “where and how” they are able to and actively fund People of Color and the work that they do. This piece was controversial; Helm has been called “audacious” for “begging for money,” and became the target of death threats and racial slurs (Herron; Palma). The author clarified that she was not demanding money and property from every White person in the U.S., rather she aimed to highlight the institutional nature of racism

and how economic contributions by those who are able can make a tangible, justice-oriented difference (Palma). The outrage demonstrated that while many people ask what they can do to help, they may not always like the answer.

The purpose of including Helm's piece and the efforts of White racial justice groups such as SURJ in recommendations for research is to encourage future studies to focus on the existing gap among movements led by People of Color such as Black Lives Matter, the understanding and acceptance of their relationship with White Privilege and supremacy, and the genuine desire and need for Whites to be active in the pursuit of racial justice. Researchers should therefore examine how People of Color and White people can work together to create creative, collaborative platforms in order to engage with issues surrounding Whiteness, privilege, and racial justice. This research should be conducted under the assumption that there are many people, many of whom hold privileged positions in society, who recognize racial injustice in the United States and want to help work against it.

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