Preparing Students to Learn about Antiracism:

Voices from Four Undergraduate Antiracist Learners

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Abstract

The authors, a professor and four undergraduates, add the dimension of preparing students for antiracist learning and to become antiracist learners to the ongoing scholarly dialogue about antiracist curricula, pedagogy, and learning outcomes, hoping to open a robust area of scholarship and practice that will include the voices of students. They consider this "pedagogy of preparation" to be an important step to readying students for the demanding intellectual, emotional, and ethical work of antiracist learning. Because college students will become the antiracist leaders in the generations to come, they need to be prepared to be antiracist learners in their classes. And if antiracist educators want to aim for the most effective pedagogies and learning outcomes, they need to understand and then help students to prepare for what Kendi (2019) refers to as "the grueling journey" of becoming an antiracist (p. 11).

Keywords

Antiracist curricula, pedagogy, learning outcomes, antiracist educators

After 400+ years of deeply entrenched, systemic racism, higher education must play a meaningful and leading role in dismantling it. Following the 2020 summer of heightened and more visible police violence against Blacks and subsequent protests and uprisings, colleges and universities began to grapple with their role – historical and contemporary -- in reinforcing and perpetuating systemic racism. These explorations and efforts cross through all aspects on higher education, including the academic curriculum. While only a handful of institutions thus far have announced mandated new requirements, many others are exploring additional ways to add antiracist content to curricula. There is a lot of work to be done; whether or not there will be real curricular change is uncertain, but we are hopeful.

These efforts take place within a sizable body of research on antiracist pedagogy. In addition, numerous studies across the disciplines focus on student learning outcomes regarding race, racism, white privilege, white supremacy, structural and systemic racism, and more, as well as discipline-specific learning outcomes. We, a professor and four undergraduates, refer to *what students learn* as "antiracist learning."

We add to the vital dialogue about antiracist curricula, pedagogy, and learning outcomes the dimension *of preparing students for antiracist learning and to become antiracist learners*, opening what we hope will become a robust area of scholarship and practice. We consider this "pedagogy of preparation" to be an important step to readying students for the demanding intellectual, emotional, and ethical work of antiracist learning.

The undergraduate authors, MaryKate, Jackie, Addison, and Jessica, were students in

Laurie's spring 2021 general education class, African American Women, cross-listed at our college in African American Studies and Women's Studies. By the third week of the semester, after she had implemented a "preparing to learn" module and read students' reflective assignments, Laurie realized how critical student voices would be to this conversation. Laurie invited all 40 students in the class to join her in this scholarly project to begin in May 2021, and MaryKate, Jackie, Addison, and Jessica were the four students who said "yes."

Because college students will become the antiracist leaders in the generations to come, they need to be prepared to be antiracist learners in their classes. And if antiracist educators want to aim for the most effective pedagogies and learning outcomes, we need to understand and then help students to prepare for what Kendi (2019) calls "the grueling journey" of becoming an antiracist (p. 11).

Literature Review

Multicultural Education

"Critical multicultural education" was a powerful force in the 1980s and 1990s. Based on a politics of difference, critical multiculturalism turned away from pluralistic stances that reinforce hegemonic, monocultural, and homogenizing structure and values. Critical multiculturalists advocate a critique of the power relations that work to undermine efforts at equality and attempt to focus on and thus remedy the uneven distribution of goods, power, and access to knowledge.

Critical multiculturalism emphasizes that multiculturalism must do more than talk about "appreciation" and" understanding," which can too easily mask the systemic roots of racism. Critical multiculturalism attends to power, structural inequalities, injustice, discrimination, and hate. Critical multiculturalism was so powerful, in fact, that it led to claims of diluting education based on identity politics.

Arguably, however, critical multiculturalism was too often drowned out by more benign forms, variously referred to "corporate," "liberal," "boutique," "institutionalized," and "neoliberal" multiculturalism. Most students experience multicultural education as the study of all different kinds of cultures (including German, Roman, Greek, and so on), and the appreciation of everything another culture has to offer. In this conception, multiculturalism is about different customs, food, dress, religious celebrations, what Olson (1998) calls "cultural and intellectual tourism-an Epcot Center approach to culture that amounts to a process of recolonization" (p. 48), and what others refer to as a celebratory diversity that ignores power relations among and between groups and overlooks systemic and institutional racism as factors in injustice

(Kishimoto, 2018). King (2016), for example, argues that multiculturalism "failed to maintain or institutionalize Black History as a focal point of implementation in schools" (p. 67).

Mejía (2011) refers to the late 90s as "the tail end of what was arguably then the 'era of multiculturalism'" (p. 146). Others, though, continue to practice a critical multicultural education that fosters equality, equity, social justice in and beyond curricula. Rubin (2018) and others argue that multicultural curriculum helps students understand privilege and oppression based on group-based differences such as race, nationality, religion, gender, or physical ability. It is socialjustice focused education.

Several scholars view antiracist pedagogy as a deeper and more focused exploration of structural racism, power relations, and social justice (Kishimito, 2018; Case & Ngo, 2017). Antiracism education is the antithesis of non-racism. Non-racism is passive rejection of racist behaviors and ideologies, accepts color-blindness, views racist acts as exclusively highly visible and overt, and denies that slavery's legacies endure. Anti-racism is critical and active, aiming to

understand and make visible how racial liberal norms, values, and ideologies operate at all levels and seeking to challenge and dismantle them (King, 2016).

Although teaching about race and racism is not new, it has become newly urgent, given the 2020 murders of several Black men and women by police officers and vigilantes leading to the national and international awakening to systemic racism's enduring brutal effects on African Americans and their communities in the US. Moreover, as Ibram A. Kendi's book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, became the critical text for understanding race and racism in the US in 2020 to the present, antiracist teaching also gained traction.

Antiracist Teaching

Since summer 2020, many have used the term "watershed moment" to describe the racial reckoning in higher education. Ash, et. al (2020) call on educational leaders to dismantle systems of White supremacy that have defined institutions since their inception and to engage "a deeper conversation on ways to address racial inequality within higher education" (p. 3). Higher education continues to perpetuate hierarchies of power and diminish economic mobility (Post-Secondary Value Commission). It is not enough for an institution's leadership to declare its concern for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) but must act to dismantle its underlying racist structures. Antiracist teaching is both about how to teach and what to teach, that is, pedagogy and content.

Antiracist teaching explicitly exposes and calls out racist ideologies, norms, and dominant narratives that perpetuate and reinforce racism at individual and systemic, structural levels, helping students to recognize racial inequality, white dominance, and white privilege. Addressing the color-blind ideology many students have learned, instructors try to identify for students the arguments suggesting the US in not Although many students have been led to believe the US is not a post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Curricula and course materials challenge exclusively or predominantly white curricula and course materials and expose how dominant narratives of white supremacy maintain racial injustice. All students should see themselves in course materials. Faculty should guide students to connect their personal experiences to the bigger picture about race and racism (Kishimoto, 2016). Moreover, antiracist pedagogy should be being intersectional (Moore, 2021).

Because teachers within higher education too often reproduce racial hierarchies, students of color constantly face a negative racial climate that influences their sense of belonging and success (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016, p. 821). Educators must recognize that racism can occur on different levels (as well as how they may contribute to them) to maintain an antiracist classroom. Disciplinary knowledge is viewed and conveyed to students as within its political, historical, and economic context to expose relations of power and privilege (Kishimoto, 2016, p. 545).

Most of the scholarship thus far on antiracist education has focused on white teachers and/or predominantly white institutions (WPIs). Partly, this is based on demographics, given that a 2013 study of faculty positions within degree-granting institutions indicated that 78 percent were White, 6 percent were African American, 4 percent were Hispanic, 10 percent were Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent were Native American/American Indian (Kena et al., 2016). But "Whites must change" for racist policies and practices to change (Affolter, 2019, p. xiv). Antiracist pedagogy begins with anti-racist identity development. White teachers must acknowledge the power and privilege white people hold, and that they are racialized and genderized, not neutral (Kishimoto, 2016). Self-reflection must be ongoing, however uncomfortable (Meidl & Levchak, 2016). It requires continuous work, self-reflection, humility (Affolter, 2019) and a constant awareness of one's positionality. People of color cannot and should not be responsible for educating whites. Therefore, white instructors, faculty, professors must become purposefully anti-racist in their pedagogy and scholarship (Affolter, 2019).

Some antiracist education scholarship focuses on non-white faculty and students (Blackwell, 2010). Instructors' and students' identities impact teaching and learning about race (Brunson & Cartwright, 2020). Brown (2019) reflects on her process as a Black female scholar to teach the only class on the sociocultural knowledge of schooling and teaching in her institution's teacher education program. Brooks (2019) analyzes her overall style of teaching, her teaching persona, and various pedagogical resources to effectively teach social justice issues in literature classes at a PWI. Using the methodology of portraiture, Ohito (2021) illustrates how being a Black male antiracist educator may involve revealing one's "authentic self to his students," leverage oral language strategically to "acknowledge the knowledge and needs of both Black (teacher) educators and Black students," and "reclaim the curricular center from Whiteness" (p. 7).

Current antiracist education "holds very few benefits for students of color" (Blackwell, 2010, p. 473). Harbin et al (2019) recognize an "epistemic advantage" for students of color when learning about race, but also the many factors that make these classes challenging and uncomfortable. Puchner and Roseboro (2011) suggest instructors of color who teach classes with predominantly white students adopt a pedagogy of purposeful compromise – "eliciting students' questioning of and resistance to inequitable practices" (p. 382).

Experiential learning is considered an important pedagogy for antiracist teaching (Loya 2010). Games have been identified as effective tools for teaching race (Brunson & Cartwright 2020; Simpson & Elias 2011; Goldsmith, 2006).

Many teacher-scholars promote community-engaged scholarship and pedagogy, field experiences, service learning as important learning experiences for antiracist education (Johnson & Heimer, 2016; Grobman, 2018). Students learn from each other and understand the life

experiences of classmates from various backgrounds when they work together in groups and teams.

Teaching about race and racism is challenging for all educators. Research supports that teaching about race often negatively impacts student teaching evaluations of faculty, particularly for instructors of color (Kernahan, 2019). Personal and institutional barriers prevent many White faculty from incorporating anti-racist teaching in their classrooms at their respective universities (Smith & Dundes, 2016; Phillips, Risdon, Lamsma, Hambrick, & Jun, 2019). White students, often resist learning in ways they don't resist in other courses, often due to "white guilt" and "white fragility" (DiAngelo, 2018). Through a study of several disciplines, Harbin et al. (2019) offer a set of pedagogical strategies and supporting classroom practices to aid faculty to maximize the efficacy of teaching race.

Scholars have studied emotional challenges for both faculty and students when teaching and learning about race and racism in the college classroom. Grosland (2019, 2013) stresses the importance of acknowledging all students' emotions. Nussbaum (2010) has long linked empathy with social justice. Boler (1999), however, suggests that passive empathy "in and of itself may result in no measurable change or good to others or oneself" (p. 178), but active empathy may lead one to take action.

Engaging students in discussions about race is especially challenging. Most educators expect conflict and try to learn how to turn it into teaching moments rather than shutting it down (Pasque et al, 2013, p. 381). Many faculty believe antiracist classrooms should be "safe spaces" for all students to express their ideas and perspectives, even those that reinforce dominant and distorted or outright false narratives. Others, however, argue that it is impossible for any discussions of racism to be safe spaces for white students and students of color. Puchner and

Roseboro (2010) attempt to build a "semisafe space" for honest dialogue. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2014) argue, "For many students and instructors of Color the classroom is a hostile space virtually all of the time, and especially so when the topic is race" (p. 7). When instructors allow open discussions that follow guidelines that include respect for all opinions, assumption of good intentions, and no judgment, they by necessity harm students of color and perpetuate racist narratives. Dennis (2020) shifts the discourse: "Black students need vocal and committed antiracist educators who are intentionally creating antiracist spaces for them. The time for faculty to do this work is now because Black students on our campuses are not okay."

Learning Outcomes and Antiracist Education

Numerous studies focus on student learning outcomes regarding race, racism, white privilege, white supremacy, structural and systemic racism, and more. Using the term antiracist learning in this sense refers to the content students learn - what they have learned that puts them farther on a path to *being* an antiracist.

The scholarship on learning outcomes in classes that include antiracist teaching are both discipline/course specific and cross-curricular. The majority of research seems to be in teacher education, but important and relevant studies exist in various disciplines such as social work, geography, sociology, psychology, STEM, English, history, and more as faculty across the curriculum incorporate topics of race, inequality, and justice into course content and teach from antiracist perspectives.

Many studies demonstrate that students in antiracist classes learn to listen to and learn from their peers and develop tools for productive dialogue (Kernahan & Chick 2017). They come to consider and appreciate new voices and perspectives. Students of color may feel affirmed of their lived experiences by seeing themselves in course materials that validate their lived experiences.

Thurber, Harbin, and Bandy suggest that increased empathy is a common learning outcome in antiracist courses. Research demonstrates that including narratives (often in the form of stories of people of color) across the curriculum increases students' learning of empathy. (Kernahan & Chick, 2017). Kernahan and Chick (2017) find that students also begin thinking about their social position and in relationship to racism and structural inequities and behaviors and their roles as potential change agents.

Many studies demonstrate that students learn about and understand racism in far greater complexity than they had been taught, both in previous schooling and through families, media churches, and more. Racism and its material consequences become visible for students, who have typically and passively been taught that "race and racism …. [is] an aberration, something that was done by a few and not aided or sanctioned by larger forces" (King, 2016 p. 63). Moreover, students have a greater understanding of structural and systemic racism, whiteness, privilege and oppression, White supremacy; their adherence to stereotypes also lessens (Kernahan & Chick, 2017; Goldsmith, 2006). Kernahan and Davis's (2010) longer-term study affirmed students greater awareness of racism and white privilege during the semester, but also found that one year later, without additional relevant courses, the students demonstrated no change or slightly reduced racial awareness and action orientation. Brunson and Cartwright (2020) demonstrate that through the use of games, students "demonstrated a decrease of

minimization of race and abstract liberalism" and "significantly reduced" white fragility (p. 28). Students in higher education who take courses based on multicultural subjects tend to show "an increased self-awareness, and the positive value of the course" (Martin, 2010, p. 536). Over time, students independently break down the issue of context and the issues concerning social power relationships.

Other studies are more cautious in their interpretation of student learning. In their study of graduate students, Puchner and Roseboro (2011) report that "most white students will not, in the space of one course, recognize their own agency in the perpetuation of privilege and racism, but they might recognize white privilege as a larger structural process that inhibits the opportunities of people of color." Whiteness may limit white students' ability to view their role in perpetuating racism and white supremacy (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Kernahan and Chick (2017) urge instructors to be mindful of "the relative progressions (and retreats) that can be expected" and "have more empathy and patience with the learning process and perhaps provide a more compassionate environment for our students."

Finally, Simpson (2006) plainly states, "it is our students who will decide what to take and leave from our classes" (p. 89). We agree that ultimately, students are responsible for their antiracist learning journeys. But as we elaborate below, we feel strongly that preparing students for antiracist learning and understanding aspects of that process will go a long way in achieving the desired learning outcomes of antiracist pedagogy.

Laurie's Story: Toward a "Pedagogy of Preparation"

Kendi's (2019) "grueling journey to the dirt road of antiracism" (p. 11) took a very long time, deep reflection and self-criticism, and a tremendous amount of learning, unlearning, and relearning. As a college instructor, specifically, I was struck by the overwhelming and painful journey Kendi described. As he rightfully claims, "When it comes to healing America of racism, we want to heal America without pain, but without pain, there is no progress" (p. 237). And I thought about the pain felt by my African American students and other students of color in my classrooms, and at the challenges, different in kind and degree, all students face in antiracist classrooms.

I've been an antiracist teacher-scholar for nearly 30 years, continuously learning from and contributing to the scholarship on antiracist pedagogy, mainly in the discipline of English. I'm fully aware that becoming and being an antiracist is a lifelong journey. I agree with Inoue (2017) that "Antiracist work in classrooms . . . is not an easy task. We all will make mistakes" (p. xviii), and I've made many. But I continue to strive to be a teacher-scholar "who recognize[s] that the work we do in academic institutions either will perpetuate the status quo built on legacies of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class domination (to name some obvious few), or intervene" (Young & Condon, 2017, p. ix). I doubt myself at times, but I re-commit myself to the work.

I read *How to Be an Antiracist* during the summer of 2020, as police violence against African Americans and the uprisings and protests that followed reignited the national conversation on race, racism, and social justice. There's no doubt that as a white, female, heterosexual, upper middle class, highly educated social justice-antiracist teacher-scholar for nearly 30 years, I continued on my own antiracist journey while reading, grappling with, and

conversing with (in my head and with others) Kendi's ideas and arguments—and will do so for the remainder of my life.

I also knew I had to keep reading and learning to improve my all-remote antiracist pedagogy as I headed into the 2020-2021 academic year. And most readers of this journal know that antiracist teaching resources were plentiful during this time. Recommendations on everything from curricular content, learning outcomes, learning activities, dealing with uncomfortable conversations, and classroom conflict were all useful. Although it had been percolating in my brain for years, it finally hit me that advice on how to be a more effective antiracist teacher was obviously very important but not sufficient.

I had other questions. How could I help my students prepare for what they would be exposed to as they begin the path of antiracist learning? How could I help prepare a diverse-inmany-ways, including race, group of students for the intense material they would study and the learning I hoped they would achieve? When we ask (require?) students to start an antiracist learning journey in our classrooms, we are knowingly bringing on pain and trauma for many of our Black students and other students of color. And we should not minimize the pain, guilt, shock, and even defensiveness white students often experience. America's history of racism is shameful and horrific. Many students learn for the first time the long hidden and distorted truths about the United States, and they also feel anger and resentment.

For many years, I briefly addressed these issues of preparing students for the work ahead through passages on my syllabi as well as brief lectures in class about the differences between opinion and fact and parsing the phrase "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion." I talked about standards of evidence in an academic community. I've talked about how learning about race and racism are different than most other courses. But I knew there was more to it, more

work to prepare students for the journey and how to navigate it. I wanted students to read this information and in greater detail and depth – not only to hear it from me – but to see it in a published article or book to take it more seriously. (It's not simply *my* opinion!).

Finally, I came across the second edition of Sensoy and DiAngelo's *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (2017) and immediately knew that Chapter 1, "How to Engage Constructively in Courses That Take a Critical Social Justice Approach," was the kind of text I'd been seeking. The authors are up front with students that social justice courses are different from other courses in that they come into these courses with strong pre-existing opinions. In "An Open Letter to Students," Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) very frankly tell students that social justice classes will make them uncomfortable in ways most classes do not due to the combination of underdeveloped academic skills, difficult theoretical concepts, and highly charged political content that is absent of complex analysis in mainstream culture, all of which is embedded within an institutional context that is structured to reproduce inequality. . . . Yet basing our knowledge on such sources as personal opinions, selfconcepts, anecdotal evidence, hearsay, intuition, family teachings, popular platitudes, limited relationships, personal experiences, exceptions, and mainstream media is insufficient for understanding and responding constructively to social injustice. (p. 30). The authors then explain what they mean by and how to put into practice the five guidelines students should follow to maximize their learning of social justice content: 1) Strive for

Intellectual Humility, 2) Everyone has an Opinion. Opinions are Not the Same as Informed Knowledge, 3) Let Go of Anecdotal Evidence and Instead Examine Patterns, 4) Use Your Reactions as Entry Points for Gaining Deeper Self-Knowledge, and 5) Recognize How Your

Social Position Informs Your Reactions to Your Instructor and the Course Content. I explain to students that I do not agree with everything Sensoy and DiAngelo say but that overall, they make a strong case for how to address their reactions when confronted with social justice materials and content.

To continue to prepare students for what they would be encountering in the course, I assigned the PBS documentary series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003). These three one-hour videos, "The Difference Between Us," "The Story We Tell," and "The House We Live In," powerfully upend myths and distorted narratives about race and racism, and lead to a common reaction by students: "Why didn't I know about this?" We spent much of the class period applying the principles Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) recommend to the content in the videos. I ended this short introduction with an assignment asking students to explain what they would focus on so that they would be open to learning about Black women's lives through academic study, followed up with "What might it mean to be an antiracist learner?"

It was a start, but not enough. I limited the amount of time given to preparing students to learn about the content in the course because I didn't want to drop any of the content I wanted to cover. But after all these months reading a lot of new scholarship, reflecting with my four coauthors, reading and responding to their narratives (which you'll read next), I am more convinced than ever that a "pedagogy of preparation" is a critical component for antiracist learning and hence, antiracist pedagogy—and a challenge antiracist educators, myself included, need to meet. Serious thought and scholarly dialogue among antiracist educators and students about what that might look like is what my coauthors and I hope will be an outcome of our article.

I say this even though, as the student narratives will convey, the five of us have been challenged as we've tried to distinguish antiracist learning from preparing students to begin and continue the path of antiracist learning. There is overlap, but also nuanced and subtle differences. MaryKate, Jackie, Addison, and Jessica's narratives of their antiracist journeys follow, focusing less on what they learned and more on how they learned. From their narratives, we hope others will be able to continue the path we have begun in terms of helping students *become* antiracist learners, thereby improving the chances they will *be* antiracist learners.

The Students' Narratives: Learning to Learn Antiracism

Jackie's Narrative

My initial approach towards social justice courses was guided by a sense of curiosity and open-mindedness. I've continued to exercise this approach as a learner because it defies the academic pressure, ironically set in a learning space, of having to know everything. My striving for intellectual humility in social justice courses keeps me from becoming overly confident about my position in an argument based on my limited knowledge (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 32). As a student of color among white peers, I expected to experience some form of validation in the classroom through the exploration of social justice issues. For the first time in my life, I had entered a learning space where my cultural perspective and lived experiences held a degree of value in relation to the coursework. In all, these classes had re-awakened a series of memories from when I lived in New York City, in which I had caught a glimpse of the many layers of discrimination. My first encounter with discrimination happened in Brooklyn, when I was nearly 11 years old and had gone to the supermarket with my cousin to buy some groceries. As we took our place in line, our attention was drawn towards some shouting directed at a Hispanic woman in the next aisle. She had unintentionally skipped a White man in line and although she had

visibly come to the realization of her mistake, her attempt to make an apology in broken English was shut down with a "Who do you think you are? You think you can just skip the line without getting caught like you crossed the border". She simply put her head down and listened with a faint smile on her face. My blood boiled with the thought that the woman could've been my mother, grandmother, cousin or aunt. Around that same period of time, my parents had been registered as illegal aliens, so this experience only magnified my worries over the distress my parents came to experience every time they were pulled over and or one of them would make it home late.

I had only ever experienced direct discrimination after having moved to Reading and attended a predominantly white private high school. I was instantly overwhelmed by the pressure of having to work twice as hard as my white peers to prove my place in honors courses. Over time, I was discouraged by the selective patterns of admiration and stereotyping that took place within certain classrooms. The academic achievement gap in these classrooms entertained the narrative that all Asian students were tied to academic success based on identity, while black students and those from other minority groups were willingly underperforming. My social life and the relationships I had built in school came crumbling down after the 2016 presidential election. I vividly remember coming into the classroom the morning after Trump's administration announced his win because a white classmate in homeroom greeted me with a "Hey Jackie, have you packed your bags yet?" It might've been a joke, but I sobbed on my way home as I realized that I too had to earn my place in my own country, seeing that even in a classroom full of American students I would always stand out.

Consequently, I entered these social justice courses in college with a wounded state of mind and a sense of "willful ignorance" which had ultimately challenged my ability to break out of a powerless mold that for so long blinded me of my own privileges (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2018, p. 32). Over time, reflective assignments on the topic of privileges allowed me to research and write about my position of power within the sectors of economic wealth and health. In one class, the instructor adapted and assigned Erica Kirby's (2016) "Encountering My Privilege (and Others' Oppression)" research and reflective project, prompting me to delve deep into the research work required to build an-depth analysis of my socio-economic privilege. As a P.O.C, I was able to identify with a privileged group of individuals who were associated with opportunity. Through assignments like these I was able to broaden my limited knowledge as I came to hold myself to the same standards of responsibility and accountability as everyone else in the classroom. Contrary to the position of confidence I held in every other course I've taken, these social justice courses have allowed me to redefine my beliefs in a position of vulnerability. During the completion of this project, I was able to come to terms with my positionality and how society devalues certain groups of people, thus limiting my understanding of the barriers people within these groups face (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2018, p. 40).

More specifically, while reading the chapter titled "Conceptual Foundations" (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013), I became overwhelmed by a sense of empowerment that made me understand the ability I held to also become a source of empowerment that people could draw from. I know that when the times comes, I will make the commitment to represent the systemic struggles of P.O.C through the creative medium of my choice.

Furthermore, throughout these social justice courses, I've come to learn that the validity of claims are measured by its connection to scholarly work. I've been encouraged within these courses to examine and reflect on my opinions through the exploration of scholarly evidence. Such classes have allowed me to further build on those concepts I'm unfamiliar with while challenging those concepts I believe to already know. For example, I had come to form my own opinions based on my parents' experiences as immigrants which were then solidified by misleading news outlets. Considering I had lived in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood where Black people stood out as individuals experiencing homelessness, I came to associate work ethic with ethnicity. Nonetheless, these opinions were challenged after my family moved to Reading, given the exposure I had to a higher level of poverty and drugs that impacted white, black, and Hispanic individuals. Moreover, the drastic change in environment allowed me to see the racial disparities that coexisted in the sectors of health and housing. During my morning drives to the South side of Reading, I often saw a Welfare office crowded by a room of predominantly white recipients, while at night the city's alleyways were pre-occupied by prostitutes of Latin background. When I stepped out of mass on Sundays, the sunset behind St. Peter's always met the corners of the streets of public housing which were filled with the laughter of Black and Hispanic children. Ultimately, these experiences allowed me to come to the realization that everyone struggled, some racial groups more than others. From there I came to understand the concept of oppression which was then deepened by readings like "Conceptual Foundations."

Nonetheless, in the three social justice/antiracist class I've taken, it was important for me as a student to voice my opinions during open discussions in order to express my interpretation of the works discussed on the basis of scholarly evidence. I came to realize that my intellectual

engagement with my classmates was refined as I strayed away from posing an argument on the basis of an opinion (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 35). Breaking down the literary works assigned in a group setting allowed me to connect with others through shared experiences and further question previous conceptions.

Prior to going into these social justice courses, I never questioned all race-based generalizations but rather assumed they held some dimension of truth. I never questioned stereotypes that acknowledged genetic markers as a defining factor of race. Having participated in sports, I held the preconception that Black individuals were naturally athletic. In the academic sphere, I had embraced the stereotype that all Asian students were academically talented. It took me a long time to understand why these stereotypes were far from complimentary but rather destructive as it held all members of a racial group to a same level of performance.

My judgement standards were challenged in the African American Women class when we were assigned to watch the PBS documentary series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003).. Ultimately these documentaries prompted me to question biological myths and political practices. Since then, I've come to hold a new understanding of race as a direct result of my exposure to the critical race theory framework. Essentially, by letting go of my personal anecdotal evidence, one of the five guidelines Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) propose, I've come to learn how to identify structural patterns of oppression within the sectors of work, health, housing, and education. Nonetheless, my initial defensive reactions in response to the discussions regarding patterns of inequality were drawn from a place of resentment towards my white peers. I envied the privilege they hid behind a shadow of denial as they made an attempt to sympathize with others. I think what helped ease my emotional discomfort within the classroom was being able to partake in the series of conversations that acknowledged white privilege,

structural barriers, and the importance of cultural perspectives; doing so enabled me to redirect my emotional reactions in a constructive manner.

More specifically, I learned to take a step back and give my white peers the opportunity to express their frustrations and sentiments of guilt, to then help steer the conversation towards the intersectionality of positions of power and the implementation of equity. For example, in my remote African American Women class, the breakout rooms functioned as a space in which white students and students of color bounced ideas and perspectives off each other in open discussions regarding patterns of discrimination and empowerment.

Prior to my engagement in social justice courses, I never saw myself in a position of power because I only ever acknowledged a racial hierarchy. I later came to understand how my positionality in society was defined beyond race, but that I also experience the benefits that come with the privilege of being in the upper middle-class bracket and being able bodied. This has further shown me that I am responsible for using my position of power to level the playing field in those identified hierarchies. As a person of color, my role as an anti-racist learner continues to be that of using my privileges to level out the playing field and further empower others. I've come to learn about the impact I hold as an individual with economic freedom. Amidst the racial tensions that arose during the previous presidential election, I chose to redirect my attention towards funding organizations that advance racial equity in the sectors of health and housing. Since then, I continue to support communities of color by sharing funding information with family and friends whilst initiating such conversations surrounding systemic inequities.

Overall, I've come to understand the concept of race as a categorical system that has been historically fueled by white self-interest. The root of racist ideas and policies stem from an embedded system of racial hierarchy that continues to be a determining factor of one's

positionality within society. Understanding the defining power of racist pedagogies and institutions has helped me unlock a level of cultural awareness that pushes forth the promotion of anti-racism and an agenda for equity. Through a student lens, I approached and still approach the concept of antiracism as a reflective practice that would enable me to explore my role in the classroom and its direct influence on group dynamics and social interactions.

My views on the defining characteristics of an anti-racist learner have changed in the sense that I have made a vow to hold not only my instructor but also myself accountable for promoting a sense of equity in the classroom when it comes to engaging in collaborative work and open dialogue.

MaryKate's Narrative

One potentially learns a lot in antiracist courses, but no one ever really teaches you exactly how to learn the material. It's hard.

As I reflect on my ongoing antiracist learning journey, I realize that conversations in and out of the classroom are especially critical to my process. Conversations in both settings can be extremely different from each other based on the environments, yet I try to keep my learning skills the same. Both in and out of school I focus on my active listening, contributing with intention, and being critically aware of my positionality and the positionality of the person(s) I am talking to. This learning is a process and I continue to obtain new skills as I move forward.

During the summer of 2020, I was having arguments about the Black Lives Matter Movement with family and friends due to it being so politicized. I had been to a protest, yet I couldn't even tell certain family members due to the fear of being ridiculed for it. Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem became a heavy topic in conversation.

People I knew considered kneeling during the national anthem to be disrespectful to this country. So, entering my sophomore year of college, I decided to take a sociology course about racism; as a Psychology major, I thought this would broaden my social science knowledge. I was excited to learn information that I could use in conversations about something so horrific like police violence against African Americans that I knew was going on.

I learned about this occurrence even further in a sociology class on racism – that Kaepernick was and is trying to bring attention to the oppression and brutal murders of POC by peaceful protest. I felt some emotions brought back up when talking about Kaepernick in social justice courses because I had previously had that argument about it. These classes are unlike any other in that they bring about strong feelings and opinions because of tensions due to the topic of racism (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 29). The classroom conversations are especially different than outside conversations. In school, there is more of a listening process than a telling other people information process. I use what I learn in the listening process in school in what I tell others in my outside conversations. I had to learn to relax (i.e. try not to let emotions interfere too much) while reading material in classes because this was the only way to have a conversation about it.

I did not think that I was a racist person, yet I thought I had some more to learn. I know that I can never truly experience the oppressive hardships that some of my friends have experienced due to my Whiteness. Taking a course involving race requires hard brain work. By this I mean that students will come across material that you may not want to believe, especially being in the U.S. where we are taught it's the best. These emotions that come from new material can be due to learning about POC being treated horribly as well as being upset that you have never heard a counterstory before.

Despite going to two different high schools, one in a White neighborhood and one online that had students from all over Pennsylvania, it wasn't until I came to Penn State that I took some social justice courses, the first being Women's Studies. Entering that class, I knew that there were differences in how society treated/treats men versus women, but the material that I read in the course gave me such concrete examples of things such as the male gaze, women being overwritten in writing, and the fact that we all belong to many groups, maybe some that are privileged and some that are oppressed, which is known as "intersectionality". My professor put a list of terms that dealt with sexuality on the board in front of us and told us to raise our hands when we got to a term we did not understand. This was a class where I made myself uncomfortable by being honest about what I did not know. I think this is key to learning how to become, in order to be, an antiracist learner.

Being a White student in a class with students of color learning about the oppression they have endured is a unique experience. Still, it is never comfortable, yet I was able to finally hear these students' voices in a class that allowed them to be heard. This is yet another part of learning in a course that teaches antiracism – you are going to hear different perspectives and have friends/peers who relate to those experiences, so you must be willing to listen and actually hear what is being said.

Active listening is something that I found occurred in most of my social justice classes. When I've been in a group and a student of color speaks on an experience, it makes the conversation grow and flow by asking questions and repeating back what was said to show that you, especially as a White student, understand and have listened to your peer. Asking questions when you are working through an idea is very important, but one must reflect on the goal of their question and whether it would bring about clarity or protection of their existing worldview

(Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 202). It is important to gain more fluency on the topic before rejecting arguments through questions.

Antiracist learning can involve "white guilt" for some students, including me. I am in the advantaged race, so I may learn in social justice courses differently than a person of color would. Talking about things like food swamps or the school to prison pipeline are things that my peers of color may know due to experience, yet I have to take a course to learn about it because I hadn't noticed or taken the time to previously look into it. I often felt guilty for being the group in power. In class, I learned what that guilt was and what to do with it: it can be acknowledged and then used to make other people in the advantaged point of view aware of the oppression occurring. Recognizing your positionality when learning in a course involving race is very important.

Antiracist learning is an ongoing process. Even though I took African American Women's Studies just a few months ago, I feel as though I have continued antiracist learning with this undergraduate research project. I have had more conversations with myself with the new material I am reading and try to focus on catching and analyzing myself in times of implicit/unconscious racism. Kendi (2019) aptly describes antiracism as supporting antiracist policy through actions or expressing antiracist idea (p. 13) and working on oneself toward the greater good of society. To stay engaged in social justice courses, I try to stay open-minded, especially because I know that there are things that I need to learn and have not done so yet. Keeping an open mind is critical due to Kendi's idea of striving to be an antiracist: "persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination" (p. 23). Previously, when I would walk into a majority White store and see a person of color, I immediately notice the lack of diversity. Why did I not notice until a POC walked in? I was so used to my "normal" (mostly

White people wherever I went), that I didn't see that the disparity until a person of color came in.

In the social justice and antiracism classes I've taken, I and other white classmates experience very strong emotions after watching or reading something such as the documentary on the White supremacist movement in Charlottesville. We would ask our professors what we are supposed to do. How are we supposed to change this cyclical, oppressive state of the world especially just being some random students? Our professors would let us know that it is great that we feel so motivated to press for change and to keep up the motivation within our communities and personal relationships. Being silent is being compliant.

Antiracist learning is within oneself, yet is also in the conversations you have with others. For example, I have learned through social justice and antiracism classes that a goal I should have is to never shut down a conversation. This can be extremely easy: if you call someone racist, how do you expect them to listen to what you have to say after that? Instead of shutting a conversation down, antiracist learning can continue when you listen with empathy. Try to see where the person you are talking to is coming from, and you can tell them the counterstories that you have learned, the statistics you have learned, and so on. A counterstory is critical storytelling that negotiates between finding ways to describe the pain caused by oppression of the master narratives while creating new, just narratives (Sakho, 2017, p. 11).

I also have conversations about antiracist learning with people I am close to. For example, I have a family friend who continuously complains about diversity training. When your coworker's daughter doesn't make it into a school, yet he uses his position at your company to get her in, he is not using his Blackness. Class should be part of this conversation too. I understand that you may not get along/know coworkers very well, so you do not invite them to

things, but you must acknowledge that they are a person of color and may take that "non-invite" as a microaggression.

I have had many conversations outside of the classroom involving antiracist learning. For example, I was speaking to that family friend about their diversity training and how they felt as though there was too much of it, and really listened to what they were trying to say. I realized that they understand, in part, the oppression that people of color experience, but they feel as though their problems are not due to their race. It takes using some counterstories in conversations like these involving different perspectives on, say, the exclusion of people of color in the workplace. I tried to explain what I learned from Kendi (2019), who explains that we can unknowingly strive to be a racist (p. 23). Saying that there is too much diversity training is expressing a racist idea. This person is White, and since they are in the advantaged race, the diversity training is to try to make those of her race inclusive with others. It is difficult to explain all of the things you learn in these courses in one conversation, so it really takes listening to where someone is coming from. This is continued antiracist learning that occurs outside of the classroom, yet simultaneously occurs with your learning in class. Because I opened my mind to learn things about antiracism, I am able to contribute to conversations with other adults about it.

Conversations outside of the classroom on the topic of race and racism, specifically with family, are especially difficult. I have honestly not made much headway with those who have not given me the same curtesy of listening to what I am saying. The key here is to not let it discourage you and to keep trying to have those tough conversations. It would be great to persuade those in need of enlightening to join you on your antiracist learning journey, but you have to remember that not everyone is going to accept what information you give them. My goal

is to keep talking about race and racism and all that I have learned in my college courses because this is how I have continued to learn how to maneuver the process of becoming an antiracist.

Addison's Narrative

To really write about my experiences involving the concept of antiracism, I need to begin with history classes in high school. They did not teach the proper information and facts to even correctly perform the critical thinking process involving race issues and the image of antiracism that I should have done years ago. Slavery was briefly, but nothing more came out of it. For example, I was taught about the underground railroad in the 19th century, but there was not much detail talking about Black women's continued oppression during the 20th century as domestics in white households, all while being disrespected and mistreated. My classes made me feel that racism and all that came from it through the hundreds of years we know about was resolved, and for a while I did feel that way. As a result, I never understood that systemic racism was carried out throughout the years and was built into American society. Now that I've read Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) chapter about constructively engaging with racism, I've realized something important: Keeping an open mind has always been something I was taught, but a mind can only be so open when the knowledge and materials that are known are limited and biased. Like Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) discussing James Bank's knowledge typology, the high school framework involved school knowledge, lacking any real depth and transformative questions keeping us from a universal perspective.

It's not surprising, then, that until studying various aspects of race and racism in college classes, I had always felt an invisible barrier due to skin color and experiences placed between me, a white person, and a person of color due to my lack of understanding and realization of what happens around us every day. I don't like to say I was unaware, since racism has been so

normalized around us. However, I just chose to disregard it, as I was not directly affected by the oppression and segregation that comes along with being a person of color. I never considered myself as a racist because I was colorblind, not acknowledging what was really happening in plain sight. Whether intentional or not, I made excuses trying to justify the structural racism in front of me. I realized I had unknowingly allowed the well-documented pattern of oppression to continue.

Before being introduced to Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019), I was not familiar with the term antiracism, it was always either you are a racist or not a racist. Kendi's work on antiracism began to show me that just because you do not partake in blatant racism, does not mean you aren't racist. He also spoke about how you can be either antiracist or racist, but that title is not permanent, it can change. Becoming an antiracist is very much possible for everyone, and it is in my direct line of vision.

As I reflect on my antiracist learning in two courses, I took in Spring 2021, the semester I was introduced to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), and the experience and process of researching and writing this article, I want to highlight not only what I learned, but how I understand the ways some of the recommendations and principles of Sensoy and DiAngelo facilitated my learning. Both of these classes helped me on the road to antiracist learning in specific ways I will further describe. Specifically, I think a student should understand what's expected of them as far as critical thinking; understanding intersectionality and their positionality; and understanding the difference between opinion and informed, educated perspectives, and the role of scholarly work.

Reflecting on Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) chapter, I began to be able to analyze my experiences within higher education and connect them to the concept of antiracism in the two classes I took in Spring 2021, African American Women and a Criminal Justice class. This is

where critical thinking really came into play; before being introduced to their overview of it, it was always just a way of answering essays on standardized tests, never something to do in my everyday life. Critical thinking is not just using what I have learned and making it sound smart and connecting it to an experience but rather using not only my own commonsense-based opinions but also considering racialized and marginalized perspectives and outside knowledge that may differ for a complete understanding (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017).

The African American Women class went into depth evaluating a wide range of sources from scholarly articles to poetry, with the main focus on understanding and applying *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 2000) to these texts. The exams provided the chance to analyze some sort of medium of our choice to gain a better understanding of what the current focus was. Learning through exams in this specific course was more common than others, usually you're to know the material long before you are to be tested on it. With these open note essay formatted tests, I was able to learn new things as I go, nothing was a direct right or wrong answer, it gave me the chance to keep an open mind when evaluating materials. For example, McClaurin (1987) spoke to me in her poetic words, especially in the poem, "The Power of Names." Not only did she fight the strict barriers placed on her due to race to earn an MFA and Ph.D., but she writes about her mother and what she has gone through, she learned through her mother's experiences that it is harder as a woman of color to get anywhere in life. McClaurin put herself in her mother's shoes to understand the sacrifices made to provide for her. And she enabled me to be able to put myself in her mother's shoes as well with her words. It is not easy understanding someone's point of view when you know little to none of what happens as a Black mother. She not only showed me the fight people of color have to go through to get where any average white

person could get to with the bare minimum, but because of reading her poem it allowed me to use the strategies she did with other authors' work.

I also thought long and hard about opinion versus informed perspectives in the class, especially in a college classroom setting. I was always aware that everyone has an opinion but there is a time and place for those, and that sometimes informed knowledge is the better choice when it comes to areas of education. Opinions matter to an extent, but knowledge and factual evidence and intellectualism need to be taken into account more so than one's own thought. This concept came into play with the African American Women class, specifically with the scholarly articles we were given to read. Opinions can only get us so far, but to reach the level of knowledge the scholarly authors we studied were at, we had to get over any prejudice and bias we formed previously. Specifically, I was assigned a project at the very beginning of the semester to create a piece of art using any sort of medium having to do with college courses and antiracist learning. I created a photo collage that depicted me, a white student and the barrier between me and people of color. The barrier in place was a fence and behind it were unacknowledged issues minorities had that did not seemingly affect me, but if I had been properly taught about being antiracist, then maybe their issues would not have seemed so invisible.

My definition that was built from authors such as Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) and McClaurin (1987) tends to go hand in hand with Kendi (2019), especially his take on the fact that the terms racist and antiracist aren't set in stone, that one's attitude and actions can make it differ. Antiracism is being able to confess to your wrongdoings and racial acts and admitting that racism is very much existent, that it is braided into the vines of the criminal justice system, education system, government, and within societal standards each one of us live by. One's own

actions determine whether or not they fit the antiracist narrative. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) helped further my definition when discussing that as students, we all have preconceived notions that barely scratch the surface. More often or not, our opinions are biased and have very little education to back it up. The concept of being antiracist shares those viewpoints as to be an antiracist is to decrease the bias that is used in everyday opinions.

Following that, the idea of striving for intellectual humility, or in other words accepting when I was wrong about something has always been a struggle. Now the idea seems quite easy to do so, however, through my own experiences, I have always felt embarrassed when I was wrong, and that followed me past my high school years. Although, that feeling of shame and shyness that came with being corrected or proved wrong has begun to disintegrate as I took some of the classes I did in college. A Sociology course I took my sophomore year is one example; the professor provided a safe space to talk about anything in the realm of race and the issues surrounding it. It felt comfortable to ask questions without the fear of feeling stupid or looking uneducated because all of us students were being thrown into an area none of us were familiar with. It would be a lie to say the start of it wasn't because of the grades we wanted to achieve, we wanted to have educated discussions to keep our GPA's high. But this motivation led me to actually being able to understand what I was talking about which in the end stuck with me. The discussions weren't anonymous, so the fear of embarrassment was evident, but I knew what I was talking about, so I felt okay to respond to someone's discussion with questions. And I felt okay knowing someone may not agree with me or I may be wrong with an answer. Because the professor taught that it is okay to not always have an understanding or an answer. The experience in that class my first year of college continued on past that semester.

The upper-level criminal justice course focused deeply on women in all branches of the criminal justice system, and the final project was a term paper on my choice of perpetrators, victims, or those employed within the system. I chose to write in depth about victims and found myself writing a lot about intersectionality, a recurring theme within many of the chapters within our class textbook, *Women, Gender, and Crime* (Mallicoat, 2018). This was one of the first courses taken that its focus wasn't said to involve race or racism, but still felt the need to bring it in due to its relevance. I was given the opportunity to comprehend the ideas of intersectionality and how much harder it is to not only be a woman involved in the criminal justice system but being a person of color as well. In the midst of final exams and research papers, I began being able to put myself in the position to allow understanding of being a woman of color. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) say, one's positionality whether we are discussing race or gender is what affects reactions and perspectives on certain things, and you need to understand that concept to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Of course, I was not able to feel everything that these women always felt, but through the textbook and documentaries assigned, the difficulties placed on women of color became more apparent. I feel that my experiences gained from this course are important to remember because it helped with my journey and understanding to becoming antiracist.

My journey as an antiracist learner continues as I research and write this article with my coauthors. As a researcher who is white, I recognize how my social position informs my approach to understanding antiracist learning from my perspective. My coauthors and I have been reading and talking a lot about our positionality, since four of us are white, and we know that doing antiracist learning is different for whites and people of color.

It also helped me to understand how power works in the case of a white educator and Black student in these Social Justice classes, to try to see how my Black classmates were positioned in our class with a white instructor. That is something I did not understand until I had begun further research for this paper, as I am an upper-middle class white woman. The difference of the status and positions involved should also be evaluated and taken into consideration to allow the same kind of experiences a white student would have with their educator. If educators continue to ignore the blatant differences in lifestyles and opportunities given to a white student and a Black student, then the gap of achievement gaps will continue to exist. Social positions matter in the sense of antiracist teaching and learning, understanding one another's position can allow easier and more successful tactics on how to teach or learn no matter the type of course.

Kendi (2019) made it clear that past mistakes feel as if they will haunt you forever and feel as if they define who you are but making changes towards a positive outlook can steer you the right way towards being antiracist. Antiracism across the board is the way to racial equality. Racial equality is absolutely necessary for a just society. As long as racial hierarchy exists today, we are not making progress into the realm that provides equal opportunities and experiences for everyone. Racism will continue to exist within rules and regulations, most without being noticed and simply being accepted into one's daily life.

The concept of being antiracist is not hard to understand, but with existing bias and opinions formed since birth, it may be hard to make that transition, but it surely is possible. I have begun the process of becoming antiracist through research and a change in attitude. To be antiracist, one cannot ignore the evident racism surrounding them, one cannot be a bystander, one cannot be defensive, and one must admit their wrongdoings to do better. There is no doubt

the transition to this kind of attitude is hard, so it is good to be prepared when making the appropriate choices during the journey of becoming an antiracist learner.

Jessica's Narrative

"Race" as a concept is a social construct. This construct was created and manipulated to benefit one group in society: white people. Racism exists on all levels from interpersonal and internalized to systemic and institutional. In order to achieve an equitable US society, racism needs to be tackled on all fronts. Figuring out how to engage critically with antiracist learning made me come to understand that even well-meaning allies need to take a close look at their own positionality and analyze how this affects their worldview and allyship.

Preceding my first social justice course as a college sophomore, antiracism to me was not an academic term and it definitely did not have a clear definition in my mind. I viewed it as just being a person who is against racism and being aware of the impact racism has on our society. While participating in the African American Women class, I made sure to focus on fully understanding the content of the academic studies and readings we were assigned to get a grasp on what they were concluding. What I perhaps viewed as readings I could skim for other classes turned into something I thought about outside of class and outside of class discussions. This information had to stay in my mind, if I was to forget it or ignore it that would be forgetting and ignoring the reality of how pervasive racism is in our society.

In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi (2019) argues that it is not enough to be not racist but that one must be antiracist. This was my introduction to "antiracist" as an identity. Prior to reading Kendi's book I believed that identifying as not racist was a positive identification, but as I started reading I saw that being "not racist" had the same social and political impact as being racist. Not speaking up against racist policy, not speaking against racist rhetoric, and in general

turning a blind eye to racial injustice as though it does not happen is just as harmful as supporting racist policy and speech. Being an antiracist learner is complex; it isn't just about *not* being racist, it's about actively challenging racist social norms and consistently educating yourself. I now see that I cannot expect this consistent education to come only from an outside source, whether that's books, journal articles, or even a professor. I have to take responsibility for understanding what I don't yet have a grasp on, how I plan on getting a grasp on it, and how to continuously hold myself accountable for my own learning.

I was born and raised in a relatively liberal town in a blue state. As a very young child this did not matter to me since I am white and I would have been treated with just as much care and respect if I had been a child anywhere else in America. Fast-forward to when I was old enough to understand not only my identity, but the identity of those around me, I saw that my experiences could have been very different had I not been white. My friends in middle school and high school detailed how they had faced everything from microaggressions to hate crimes while living in the exact same town as me: the same town that I had always perceived as welcoming, kind, and open minded. Despite hearing about how much racism impacted their lives, it was never discussed in depth in any of my middle or high school classes. This made me angry as I kept advancing through school. There were multiple incidents of racial slurs shouted through hallways, swastikas carved into desks, and kids suspended for standing up for themselves when attacked for wearing hijabs, yet the administration pretended nothing was wrong. I remember thinking, well of course adults are so full of hate if they never learn how not to hate as kids. Then I decided if my high school teachers were not going to teach about being antiracist, I would find college professors who would.

The class on African American Women was the first class I was able to take that dealt with race in college. All of the dark and horrible history of this country that was unjustly glossed over in my prior classes was finally being shared. This class also presented a challenge. For the first time in my academic career I had to learn how to really learn. I could not memorize facts and just blurt them onto a test. We had to think critically in this class. One of the first assignments we had was reading Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) "How to Engage Constructively in Courses That Take a Critical Social Justice Approach". This was the first time I ever had to think about how I as a student influenced my own learning. The authors list steps that the student must take, and reading this section helped me as a learner greatly.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) list striving for intellectual humility as the first that a student needs to do when learning about antiracism. It's hard for anyone to come to terms with the fact that a belief you hold is wrong and it's even harder to admit you're wrong when someone directly calls you out for it. This is especially relevant to admitting an idea you expressed is racist. Kendi (2019) discusses how the word racist is perceived as a pejorative and so of course nobody wants to admit that they did or said something racist. However, not acknowledging that and denying it is just as bad as continuing to actively support racist ideas. I've definitely had moments in classes where I thought something the instructor said couldn't be right because I had previously heard something different.

For example, when learning about the wage gaps that exist in America in 2019, my teacher brought up that Asian Americans, both men and women, earn more on average than White Americans. I thought that there's no way this could be true because I always heard that White men make more than men of color and that the same applies to White women and women of color. This was challenging for me to accept because I did not want to come to terms with the

fact that I was wrong. I never vocalized it, but I've come to understand that the instructor has studied their topic for much longer than I have so my reaction to think that what they said couldn't be right is problematic. If I had denied the statistics of the wage gap I would be blind to a major part of the model minority myth that affects actual racist policy in this country, in effect furthering the already substantial wage gap. It's okay to not know everything, and expecting yourself to know everything is setting an impossible standard as well as diminishing an ability for learning.

Becoming an antiracist learner includes the student having the ability to recognize the difference between opinions and informed knowledge (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). I started the African American Women class with a sense of apprehension. I fully expected for there to be certain students who took this class on Black women's studies just needed a credit, and not because they genuinely wanted to learn about the issues. I expected for there to be some type of ignorance from students who enjoy creating conflict, because they could use the excuse "it's my opinion" in a class that is by many not considered as objective as chemistry or math. This issue came up a lot for me in my past high school history classes. We used to have what the teachers called "Socratic seminars" in which instructors had us casually debate certain topics that should not have been up for debate, usually involving violating a group's human rights.

While learning (misinformation) about the gay rights movement in my freshman history class, we were told to discuss whether we thought gay marriage should be federally legalized. Some students would say very bigoted things and would then back their opinion up by saying that everyone is entitled to their opinion. However, their beliefs were based on feelings even though there was information available to easily disprove their "opinion". One student said he did not support legalizing gay marriage because gay couples saw higher rates of domestic and

sexual violence in their relationships. Though this was blatantly untrue, when I said that there was information available that would disprove his claim, he said he was allowed to think that because it was his opinion.

Another instance was a long time ago, however this story still sticks with me to this day and makes me uncomfortable. In seventh grade, we were learning about debating and our teacher separated us into groups and gave us debate topics. She assigned us as either being pro or con for the topic we were given. I was put in a group that was assigned to argue that the Civil Rights movement should not have happened. Debates should be about using informed knowledge to defend your talking point, but because of our subject, my group member and I were allowed to make up opinions and use them as our argument. The reason that this stuck with me almost 8 years later is not only because the topic I argued for embarrasses me, but because of the impact I feel it had on my perception of what learning entailed. As a student, especially as a *young* student, I carried the belief that an opinion could be substituted for informed knowledge if there was no concrete information available on the subject I needed to learn about.

Unfortunately, this did not end in middle or high school, but continued into college. I started my second social justice class, called Contemporary Health Issues, in college in the summer semester of 2021 at my local community college. Like many of my previous classes, we have weekly discussion posts in which we are required to answer our professor's questions and then respond to other students' posts. We were asked to respond to whether or not violence against people of color had increased in recent years. Data from the FBI showed that hate crimes rose to their highest numbers in a decade (2020). However, some students still said that violence had not increased. The publicly available data shows that these students are wrong. Keeping in mind the guideline Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) discussed, I was able to recognize that the

argument some students were making was based entirely on their opinions and did not hold any real weight.

Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) list includes letting go of personal anecdotal evidence and looking at broader societal patterns instead. I do not have much academic experience in social justice courses. Most of what I have learned about racism in this country was learned through self-education, and a portion of this education came from personal anecdotal experiences of people of color. This led me to see that no two people had the same exact experiences. While one person recalled that they had experienced regular and severe harassment about their race, their friend claimed that they never faced what they perceived as any type of open discrimination. Both of their experiences are valid, and shape the way that they see the world, but just listening to one or two or even three people's anecdotes does not create a fair representation of what is actually true. Broader social patterns exist. It is impossible to create an accurate world view through only looking at personal anecdotes. Collins (2000) emphasizes the concept of how motherhood and othermothering transforms Black women's mothering "into full-fledged actions as community leaders" (p. 191). This idea was different from what I had known in my personal life. All I heard as a child was that other families' issues were not my business, and my friends growing up shared that their families had the same mentality. There was no sense of a larger community. I assumed my personal experiences were universal. Collins, however, presented that the opposite is true. Keeping Sensoy and DiAngelo's guideline in mind, I had to understand that personal anecdotal evidence is not all encompassing. The acknowledgement and acceptance of broad societal patterns is critical to learning about social justice.

Using reactions as entry points for gaining deeper self-knowledge is the fourth guideline given by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017). I would like to think that I don't have defensive reactions

to learning new things. Part of becoming an antiracist, according to Kendi (2019), is acknowledging and struggling with the fact that you held or hold racist ideas. I had a very hard time coming to terms with this. I could point out when somebody else is being racist but I never wanted to acknowledge that I could be racist as well. My defensive reaction made me realize that I never wanted to open myself up to being perceived in a negative light. However, we live in a country that instills racist ideas through its racist policies. It would be harmful for me to deny that because I benefit from the effects racist policies. My defensive reaction to learning about the wage gap I mentioned under striving for intellectual humility was a racist reaction. Reality is more nuanced than just black and white. Just because White men hold so much power in

America does not mean that every other group of people is powerless.

Finally, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) say a student should accomplish is recognizing how their own social positionality (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability-status) informs their perspectives and reactions to their instructor as well as the individuals whose work they study. There are certain limitations of awareness that I have in regard to my positionality as well as things that I can relate my own lived experiences to. Sometimes I can apply things from my own experience to the perspectives of my instructor and the work they share. I admit that as a queer woman I am skeptical of a straight instructor discussing LGBTQ+ issues, whereas if my instructor was also queer I would intrinsically believe what they have to share about the same issues. Because of this, it is necessary to be aware of how your positionality influences your perspective. I believe this relates back to striving for intellectual humility. While positionality can influence how you react to your instructor it should not lead to you ignoring the instructor. This is especially relevant for information that you cannot relate to. Black teachers that I have

had in the past talked about their experiences as Black Americans in an educational setting. It was shocking to me to hear about the discrimination they had faced, however, a Black student might not have been so surprised hearing this because they have experienced similar things. So while I understand certain perspectives and I can empathize with them, I cannot fully know how it actually feels to live with that perspective. While studying in the African American Women course I focused on truly listening to fellow students in breakout rooms and discussions who had different perspectives which formed from varying positionalities. Being aware of my positionality and how it affects my perspective as well as how I react to the perspective of others became a fundamental part of learning about antiracism for me.

Conclusion:

As the student authors' narratives demonstrate, four main concepts are important to all of them when approaching learning about antiracism. These include striving for intellectual humility, the act of recognizing one's positionality, the connection between active listening and acknowledging one's prior biased beliefs and uninformed opinions, and the shared experiences of high school classes and their lack of information connecting to race and the changes within themselves that came with social justice courses in college. Their narratives emphasize the importance of preparing students how to learn antiracist content.

Yet, the students have various individual experiences (in and out of the classroom), personalities, and positionalities that have led to different emphases for each student. Jackie came to redefine her positionality through social justice courses by identifying her position of power within certain sectors of society while being on the receiving end of discrimination. Particularly important to MaryKate when learning in antiracist college courses is striving to

understand and listen to her peers' counter stories and different experiences. This allows for a growth in conversation without rejecting arguments through opinionated questions. Addison's antiracist learning is incumbent upon the chance to understand experiences of people of color and reduce the amount of bias intertwined in her everyday life. The scholarly work heavily studied throughout the semesters helped Addison with her journey of becoming antiracist. Learning in her courses showed Jessica that unlearning the mistruths she previously believed was just as big of a part of antiracist learning as actively taking in and absorbing antiracist knowledge. Acknowledging the presence of proactive interference, that previous learning may hinder subsequent learning, is the key to breaking it and taking in the new information.

Four perspectives from four undergraduates only scratches the surface of how to prepare students for the journey of antiracist learning in a college class to optimize antiracist learning. Most obviously, only one of the students, Jackie, is a person of color; the other three, and the professor, are white. But we hope this article begins what we think are critically important conversations in scholarship and in classrooms.

We identify here only a handful of the possibilities for future research. Practical issues need to be considered, such as the amount of time in a course spent on this preliminary work before getting to the content of the course itself. And what will this preparation look like in various antiracist classes? What texts and activities will be effective? How will faculty build on Sensoy and DiAngelo's work?

In addition, just as antiracist learning is different for white people than it is for people of color, how should/might antiracist learning preparation differ based on students' race. And the

professor's race? How and to what extent are other aspects of students' and professors' positionality relevant? What other individual factors impact preparing for antiracist learning?

We also suggest a wide range of research methods, conscious attention of researchers to their values, and ensuring that the research includes a diverse range of voices and perspectives. We also stress the significance of hearing students' voices beyond personal narratives, such as observers studying live classes. Those who study the writing process often research students' cognitive thinking during the process of writing and revision meta-analyses,

We, the five coauthors, agree with Utheim (2020) that "higher education has a formidable responsibility to foster public dialogue across diverse perspectives and tease apart the complex questions that confront society and our global humanity" (p. 3). While antiracist learning is a critical component of this responsibility, so is preparing students to become antiracist learners. Kendi (2019) ends the introduction to *How To Be an Antiracist* with these three sentences: "We know how to be racist. We know how to pretend to be not racist. Now let's know how to be antiracist" (p. 11). We add, let's explore together, teacher-scholars and students, how to best prepare students for the challenges and insights of their academic antiracist journeys.

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