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“THEY’RE PROTECTING WHITENESS AND THEIR FRAGILITY IS SHOWING”:
HOW FEMINIST PRAXIS DISRUPTS WHITE SUPREMACY IN
NEOLIBERAL PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by
Christina Nelson

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in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

“THEY’RE PROTECTING WHITENESS AND THEIR FRAGILITY IS SHOWING”: HOW FEMINIST PRAXIS DISRUPTS WHITE SUPREMACY IN NEOLIBERAL PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Christina Nelson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Professor Anna Mansson McGinty

Predominately white institutions (PWIs) embody white policies, culture, and ways of educating that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). This research addresses the ways in which feminist praxis disrupts white supremacist violence in PWIs. Literature highlights the ways in which white supremacy is disguised through the language of diversity, how the university community is able to build community despite barriers in the university, and how each primary player (faculty, staff, and students) navigate institutional violence. This research draws on ten interviews with faculty, staff, and students at a public and private PWI in an urban Midwestern city. Although the sample size is small, the interviews highlight marginalized voices of those doing anti-racist work inside and on the university. Results of this study highlight the ways white supremacy is present in PWIs, the difference between public and private universities, how feminist praxis by faculty, staff, and students is demonstrated to resist institutional violence, and suggestions to transform the university by bureaucratic changes or divesting from the university.

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To graduating Black, Brown, and Indigenous Students of Color
surviving and resisting white supremacy in institutions,
who did not have the opportunity
to walk in the spring of 2020 commencement ceremony
due to Covid-19.
Your accomplishments are recognized and celebrated.

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LIST OF KEY TERMS

Anti-racist racist: An anti-racist is someone who exclusively identifies as white that approaches social, cultural, and political issues with an anti-racist lens to support non-white people, cultures, and experiences. Anti-racist racists are aware of their inherent racism of material and historical privileges, and actively work towards disrupting the benefits they receive.

Belonging: Belonging can be described as the emotional or spiritual connection to a place or group. A sense of belonging is strengthened by mutual respect, care, intention, and practice.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color

Ethics of care: An ethics of care can be described as having and practicing deep regard or proclivity for others that is humanistic and nurturing. An ethics of care demonstrates the necessity to center voice, respect, and empathy for others, which pushes interdependence and preservation of connection.

Feminist Praxis: Feminist praxis is bridging feminist theory into feminist action. Examples can be care work, community building, and interdependency that is empowering in nature.

Institutional Plumbers: This term is taken from Ahmed's *On Being Included* (2012) to describe faculty, staff, and students who do anti-racist work inside and on the university that can lead to radical restructuring or systemic change in the university.

Multiculturalism: Multiculturalism can be described in this study as a liberal framework to add non-white bodies to a predominately white space, without addressing historical violence. Multiculturalism is often understood as a way to incorporate non-white bodies, experiences, and culture for the benefit of white individuals which can be exploitative.

Neoliberalism: Neoliberalism can be described as a social, cultural, and political ideology that elevates individual responsibility, under a false liberal notion of peace without regard to

oppressive systems. Neoliberalism is often described as the new wave of capitalism. This study will primarily explore through individualism and increased output without regard for adversity, oppression, or structural barriers.

PWI: Predominately White Institution; Predominately white institutions are described as four year universities populating over 50% white individuals. PWIs are historically and presently operating through a white hierarchy and invest in white policies and initiatives to benefit white individuals and culture.

Racism: Racism can be described as a system that upholds racial power and privilege, namely white individuals, that consciously or unconsciously discriminate against those not in power, namely non-white individuals. For the context of this study, those who can be racist are white identified folks.

Racial capitalism: Racial capitalism can be described as the value derived from a person's racial identity. In this study, racial capitalism is used to illicit economic and social value from BIPOC individuals for the benefit of white individuals in higher educational institutions.

Violence: Violence in this study will be described as implicit, covert, or interpersonal acts that have a negative or adverse impact on someone's well-being, safety, and success. This should not be confused with overt acts such as physical altercations and direct psychological abuse.

White supremacy: White supremacy is commonly understood as overt acts of violence directed towards non-white individuals that includes preserving white culture, values, and beliefs. For the focus of this study, white supremacy also includes acts of violence that are covert, manipulative, and controlling in order to center and prioritize white culture, value, identities, and power.

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I acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territories in Minowakiing [temporarily occupied by Milwaukee] of the Menominee, Miami, and Potawatomi on which I live, learn, and write as a settler, student, and educator. It is important for me, as a white researcher, to recognize the Indigenous territories that my University occupies, so I can approach feminist research with a decolonial and intersectional lens in order to center the struggle for Indigenous human rights.

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I want to recognize the labor the Ad Hoc Coalition of and for Students of Color (Coalition SOC) at Marquette, a community of student organizers who fought tirelessly in and outside of the Marquette hierarchy to create change on campus. I was inspired by the leaders of Coalition SOC and my involvement to stress the importance of student activism and its histories to be part of institutional change and the ability to cultivate education outside of neoliberal structures. For the collective knowledges that were shared, I am forever honored and humbled.

To those who model and continue to educate me in ways I have and have yet to notice, I am grateful. To honor those most close, I am grateful for the support and wisdom my kinship sibling, laree, offers. Words cannot begin to note how appreciative I am for your modeling of honor, respect, and accountability that have helped me grow as an individual and in and outside of this research.

Last, but certainly not least, I acknowledge my brother, Curtis, who unexpectedly passed away during my graduate studies. Although my brother is not present, I hope his memory of compassion and strength is a motivating theme through this thesis as a form of feminist praxis that is urgently needed in higher education.

To all invested, I am grateful and honored for your support, wisdom, and strength.

Introduction

“Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it.” (Freire, 1993, p. 45)

As a white first-generation college graduate who attended a mid-sized private university, my identities and experiences inspired this study. My whiteness offers a level of inherent violence to this study because of the history of privilege and structural and overt acts of harm my ancestors have contributed to society. This echoes my experience in identifying as an anti-racist racist, who, as a white persxn, is inherently racist, but applies and is accountable to anti-racism in my life through activist, educator, and research capacities. White supremacy is frequently misunderstood as only pertaining to overt or explicit acts of violence like neo-Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan. However, white supremacy in the context of this study centers the relationship between historical and unconscious bias that benefits whiteness through its structures, policies, culture, and experiences over non-white individuals. Therefore, it is irresponsible for me to begin this study without acknowledging the privileges I am afforded in conducting this study, as a white individual, but also the contribution I make to violence. Like white supremacy in the academy, violence in the university shows up in different ways than what may be explicitly produced, such as, physical altercations and direct psychological abuse. Violence in the context of this study includes interpersonal violence like slurs and ignorance, policies that disproportionately have a negative impact on marginalized identities or bodies, the hierarchical misuse of administrative power that make change seem impossible, and the lack of understanding and support given to the marginalized university community. This is demonstrated by university sponsored speakers who produce harmful rhetoric, lack of resources and funding for marginalized peoples, and gaslighting students. The relationship I have with this study speaks

to the resistance I have experienced doing anti-racist work within institutions, but frequently overlooked the value of narratives and experiential knowledges that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) offer. Therefore, the aim of this study is to center the voices of those who experience violence from the university for doing anti-racist, communal, and liberatory work with and on the university.

Predominately white institutions (PWI) are over 50% white individuals, four-year universities that prioritize and invest in white policies, culture, and approaches to education (Beasley et al., 2016). By prioritizing whiteness in the approach to education, BIPOC individuals largely experience racial hostility (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Bourke, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009) and a lack of belonging (Curtin et al., 2013; Graham & McClain, 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009), which has a negative impact on their success in the university (Beasley et al., 2016; Krause et al., 2005). The negative impact PWIs have on the BIPOC university community demonstrates the great need to better understand how and through what forms of resistance marginalized groups survive in a toxic educational space. Feminist scholarship highlights the need for liberatory practices in pedagogy (hooks, 1994), but also for student activism that have historically made radical changes in the structure of the university (Ryan, 2004).

This research is shaped by Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included* (2012) and her use of "institutional plumbers." Institutional plumbers are comprised of faculty, staff, and students who do the work inside and on the university to create an anti-racist space that centers difference and challenges neoliberal diversity narratives. The intention to focus on institutional plumbers is to unpack how feminist praxis was used to disrupt white supremacist violence in PWIs and how each plumber was part of change and could voice their struggles or suggestions for institutional

change. Sara Ahmed's scholarship has a radical focus on care ethics, praxis, and accountability which influences my feminist approach to research. In addition to Ahmed's text, bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) was used in this research to guide the latter portion of the literature review and results. Feminist praxis in the context of this study is implementing feminist positions and theories into practice, which is what hooks articulates in her text. Her emphasis to disrupt hierarchy and value students in the classroom in order to build community is centered in her desire for liberation for all. As the results of this study are described, there is a push to fully invest in pedagogies and activism with an ethics of care that supports this liberatory framework.

The intentionality of this study was to remain feminist in nature by prioritizing care for the participants through establishing rapport and community. I established rapport with the participants and provided them with the questions before the interview. I offered them opportunity to ask questions and choose their own pseudonym. The interviews revealed several themes: the prevalence of white supremacy in the two PWIs through culture, administration, histories, and ongoing violence; the ways in which public and private universities branded themselves and the violence they caused; how institutional plumbers resisted structural racial violence; how feminist praxis was essential in resistance; and the suggestions institutional plumbers offered as alternative ways in which the change of educational institutions can be situated.

This study highlights the importance of institutional plumbers' resistance within the university and how it was situated in caring and nurturing themselves and others. Building an empowering and nurturing community and space in the university, was essential for many of the participants. Community was elucidated through classroom spaces, mentorship, and pedagogical approaches. In addition to building community in the university, breaking away from the

institution presented another way institutional plumbers resisted institutional violence, but also to navigate communal space without the pressure of branding it to the university. Finally, institutional plumbers centered the importance of self-care and finding solidarity with others in the face of university violence, which can be described as feminist care praxis.

While this research sample was small, it was important to my approach to value the knowledges, experiences, and narratives voiced by institutional plumbers, which are often overlooked and exploited in the university. The findings of this study point to the need to take a critical look at the intent of the university when using the identities and experiences of BIPOC individuals and labor as a capitalistic branding opportunity, rather than valuing BIPOC experiences. While the Midwest cannot be compared to the entirety of the United States, there are some central aspects, such as segregation in urban environments, that reflect many metropolitan areas in the United States. A critical and feminist reflection about the interviews and the interview encounters would be to acknowledge the influence of my whiteness in this study. Acknowledging the importance of positionality, had the researcher of this study identified as a BIPOC individual, the interviews and the analysis of them would have been different. Naming and taking accountability for my whiteness that causes harm by existing is essential in being an anti-racist educator and activist within educational institutions. My positionality and experience as an anti-racist racist can serve as a model to other white activists and researchers in education to take accountability for violence they contribute with to the academy, which has benefited from the labor and experiences of BIPOC individuals.

Literature Review

Overview of Literature Review

Predominately white institutions (PWIs) hold a space that structurally supports and privileges the experience of white individuals, while capitalizing and tokenizing the experience of BIPOC students. While diversity initiatives are described to bridge racial difference and support equality, the initial use of diversity focuses privileges and affirms whiteness (Melamed, 2014). Universities aim to dispel white supremacist ideologies with a variety of diversity centered approaches such as diversity statements, centers, and initiatives to create an inclusive space without addressing its histories, hierarchy, or capital gained from the labor of its BIPOC community. The implications of white supremacy and neoliberalism disproportionately effect BIPOC students and faculty. Universities use the language of ‘diversity’ to offer the intention to support BIPOC students who experience adversity (Ahmed, 2012). However, by offering centers, programs, and diversity statements, is still facilitated through white committees, administrators, and ideals (Ahmed, 2012). In the university, there are documented violent experiences by BIPOC students, such as the lack of belonging (Curtin et al., 2013; Graham & McClain, 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009), adverse mental well-being (Beasley et al., 2016; Bourke, 2010; Graham & McClain, 2019), racial hostility (Bourke, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009), and the erasure of one’s self (Beasley et al., 2016; Guiffreda & Douthit, 2010; McClain & Cokley, 2017). These implications have a lasting impact on BIPOC students and the university struggles to offer alternative solutions to improve the success of BIPOC students. Feminist praxis, such as implementing an ethics of care through mentoring, teaching, and structural support, may be a solution to support BIPOC students in the university. Feminist praxis to center liberation (hooks, 1994) and self-care (Mountz et al., 2015), may be a

way to find success in the university and to unsettle white supremacy. The ways in which students, faculty and staff have historically approached white supremacy varies, however, there is solidarity and comradery within the fight to disrupt white supremacy in the institution.

“Diversity”: The University and Racial Identities

The initiative to recruit BIPOC students in the university dates back to the motive to ‘diversify’ the student body. The lawsuit, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, resulted from the intent to diversify the university, which claimed that there was a need for 15% of student demographics be populated by BIPOC bodies (*University of California v. Bakke*, 1978). While this court case was aimed at getting more BIPOC students into higher educational spaces, specifically to populate more BIPOC doctors, white individuals argued that it was unconstitutional and violated the fourteenth amendment (Melamed, 2014; *University of California v. Bakke*, 1978). Therefore, the result of the *University of California v. Bakke* case was that race was only considered when “obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse body” (Melamed, 2014, p. 86; *University of California v. Bakke*, 1978). This decision speaks to what is considered a diverse body and introduces the concept of racial capitalism.

The term ‘diversity’ has been used in the university in order to increase demographics of non-white students, but what is commonly misunderstood is the inception of the word ‘diversity.’ Diversity language in the university begun post-Civil Rights era as a way to push integration, providing opportunities for white and non-white students to bridge connections, and broaden perspectives (Phillips, 2019; Swain, 2013). However, diversity and race, Jodi Melamed (2014) describes, “appear together first across two disparate yet interrelated domains that influenced the organization of U.S. modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: liberal political philosophy and race sciences” (p. 85). While situated in assigning what is considered

“good,” as a Eurocentric and free society, or “bad,” as biologically inferior, diversity among race, parallels to eugenics, as who is desirable or undesirable, and places value on white individuals (Melamed, 2014). Melamed further describes, “the ruse of racialization lives on: forms of humanity are valued and devalued in ways that fit the need of reigning political-economic orders” (2014, p. 86). This points to the correlation between race and capitalism. Nancy Leong describes racial capitalism as “the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person” (2013, p. 2152). Racial capitalism frameworks argue that the value of BIPOC representation is derived from what is considered to be of value for the use of whiteness without genuinely valuing the input, experience, or identities of BIPOCs (Leong, 2013). Melamed affirms this by sharing, “racial capitalism deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differently to fit the needs of reigning state-capital orders” (2015, p. 77). Racial capitalism decides what is and is not valued and therefore impacts how we approach our understanding of difference. While institutions attempt to create an appearance of being more diverse, white supremacy hinders the possibility of becoming too diverse. White supremacy in the framework of the university elucidates the covert structural ordering of the university, such as the white dominated administrators or board of regents. Leong explains, “[i]f a white majority at a school comes to perceive that there is ‘enough’ diversity, for example, the marginal value of nonwhiteness diminishes” (2013, pp. 2171-2172; Milem, et al., 2005). While universities strive to commodify non-white bodies in order to preserve the appearance of diversity, there is a limit to the presence of BIPOC bodies in order to preserve whiteness.

To describe the university as neoliberal can be understood as the prioritization of accelerated academic output without the consideration of emotional labor, resources or its effects

(Melamed, 2006; Mountz et al., 2015). Neoliberalism emphasizes individual responsibility without addressing systemic violence that disproportionately affects marginalized groups (Perez & Salter, 2019). Individualism in the university puts the responsibility of sourcing knowledge on the individual without consideration of structural barriers to access knowledge. Additionally, students, faculty, and staff are battling budget cuts, additional responsibilities, and barriers without support from the university (Mountz et al., 2015). The forced acceleration of academic output and the disregard of the value the university community offers broadens the divide of marginalized identities and pushes individual responsibility as a way to source capital. The neoliberal university, therefore, capitalizes on what will illicit the best financial output without consideration for implications. This speaks to the neoliberalization of the university in managing and exploiting non-white bodies or experiences, while upholding the value of whiteness.

While universities engage in superficial efforts to increase diversity, these efforts create violent conditions and do little to support institutional change. Approaches to diversify institutions have some violent implications that universities do not approach with accountability. Namely, the influence of racial capitalism through tokenizing and exploiting BIPOC students and faculty to brand the university as ‘diverse.’ Diversity initiatives do little to change the structure of universities which was established through racialized exploitation of exclusions (Ahmed, 2012). In an op-ed piece, Nkozia Knight shared her experience of George Washington University being contradictory by not explicitly naming or teaching the history of the university, such as being named after a slaveholder, while celebrating Black History Month (Knight, 2020). Universities lack accountability to their histories of violence and use cultural months as a publicizing opportunity that does not address the issue and further contributes to toxic university culture. This demonstrates the violence universities operate in a violent colonial structure

(Beasley et al., 2016) that benefits the white university community, while silencing BIPOC experiences. Additionally, hate crimes have risen over the past five years (Bauman, 2018) and explicit racist acts have continued (Wright, 2020). Wright describes the experience of a Michigan State University student who observed “nooses placed on the doors of Black students’ dorm rooms around Halloween, as a ‘prank’” (2020). Universities rarely take explicitly anti-racist approaches to such incidents or seek to foster accountability to make systemic change. For instance, the University of California-Los Angeles created an online module to educate the campus community around equity and diversity (Brophy, 2020). This module attempts “to give students an introduction to discussing identities in a respectful way—tackling issues like racism, microaggressions, and privilege through personal stories and acted-out scenarios” (Brophy, 2020). This passive effort to educate students around ‘diversity’ not only comforts the white experience, but neglects the issue of white supremacy and the lack of accountability for the violence the institution creates.

Using the language of diversity prompts the understanding of equality (Ahmed, 2012), without saying there is a present uniformity in institutional culture. For example, multiculturalism within institutions takes the “feel good” liberal mentality to add diverse bodies to the institution, but ignores the violence of white supremacy that the university cultivates through racial capitalism. Diversity is therefore seen as a recruitment tactic and as a way to sell the university to prospective applicants of color (Leong, 2013). Ahmed notes, “[p]art of this appeal of diversity seems to be about newness. Using a newer word allows you to be aligned with the value system of the institution given that ‘newness’ is often what is given value” (2012, p. 61). Therefore, the neoliberal university is situated within the context of neoliberal multiculturalism in which the university is seen as heterogenous, capitalizing on the embodiment

of diversity and inclusion within the university. Melamed quotes the United Parcel Service's slogan, "What can Brown do for you?" (2006, p. 13) to call attention to the violent historical relationship between BIPOC laborers and service work in institutions (Leong, 2013). Although Melamed wrote these words fourteen years ago, they continue to resonate deeply when considering how university diversity efforts employs racial capitalism as institutional racial management (2006).

Universities approach creating a diverse student body through performative ways, such as, diversity statements, establishing committees to recruit non-white bodies, and with promotional material (Ahmed, 2012). Ahmed states, "[c]ommitment is an interface between policy and action: if a commitment is made on paper, it does not necessarily commit unless you act on and with the paper" (2012, p. 140). There is a difference between a commitment and action to create inclusive and diverse environments within the university, which is what Ahmed notes. The commitment to having a conversation about becoming diverse, can be a way of protecting the university for lack of change because there are ongoing conversations happening. When there is a symbolic commitment to diversity, such as documentation on paper, it does not inevitably mean there will be change in the university structure, only that the university is committed to trying (Ahmed, 2012). The commitment to diversity does not demonstrate structural results, however, it ensures that the university has a goal in mind. To emphasize, Ahmed names the university approach to commitment to diversity as a 'tick box' approach (2012). She shares, "When diversity becomes ticking the boxes, then organizations know how to fulfill the requirements. As Michael Powers argues, one of the big problems with audit culture is the tendency to produce comfort rather than critique" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 105; Power, 1997, pp. 124-126). Universities adopt this approach to demonstrate they have steps in place to elicit

outcomes (Ahmed, 2012), however, university culture does not always reflect results. With this commitment, committees are formed, assessments are conducted and a list of aims, or ‘tick boxes,’ are created, to show something is being done. Ahmed adds, “[i]f commitment can become a tick in the box, it suggests that institutions can make commitments without being behind them.” (2012, p. 119). This institutional performance is a commitment to an endless recycling of goals and initiatives to prompt structural change rather than addressing the violence created by the university.

In addition to diversity statements being a symbolic commitment, they also protect whiteness in the institution. Melamed described the rejection of eugenics after World War II and how the terms ‘race’ and ‘diversity’ had complex associations (2014). During the Cold War, a form of liberal anti-racism developed which sought “to modernize and extend freedoms once reserved for white/European Americans to all U.S. inhabitants regardless of race” (Melamed, 2014, p. 86). This parallels with neoliberal university goals by staying silent about racism, homophobia, classism, to name a few, in the institution; there is a language shift in calling it a commitment to diversity, rather than to denounce white supremacy within the academy. Ahmed shares, “[w]hen racism becomes an institutional injury, it is imagined as an injury to whiteness. The claim ‘we would never’ uses the language of racism as a way of protecting whiteness from being hurt or damaged. *Diversity can be a method of protecting whiteness*” (2012, p. 147). Not only does the language of diversity protect whiteness, it creates a system in which it manages whiteness in order to create a branding opportunity (Melamed, 2014). Establishing a campaign to create and prioritize diversity within the academy is a way to reject that identity-based violence ever existed and to sway conversations towards equality. However, the push towards equality is still rooted in violence because there is an expectation of conformity and assimilation within the

current university culture (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Bourke shares, “[t]he property rights of [w]hiteness are transmitted to [w]hites in these spaces by setting up Black students as others against which the normalcy of [w]hiteness is checked” (2010, p. 133). The culture of whiteness is embedded in the university structure and therefore enforces conformity to those ideals, rather than build on difference, in order to achieve success. Whiteness then can be elucidated as “acquiring value by functioning as property” (Leong, 2013) which assigns material, social, and economic value to white individuals, culture, and systems. There is the expectation in the university that success comes from how closely one aligns themselves with whiteness, white culture, and goals that universities name as standards and objectives (Leong, 2013).

Moreover, colorblindness may be an alternative approach to achieving diversity at universities. Colorblindness as a racial ideology does not acknowledge race as differentiating people by color, while dismisses the historical disadvantages and violence BIPOC individuals have experienced (Harper, 2012). Harper states, “[w]hites use color-blind racism primarily to explain racial differences in ways that exonerate them of any responsibility” (2012, p. 11). That would suggest that universities do not practice accountability for violence they have caused and that they are complicit by creating ongoing structural violence. This lack of accountability in racial violence demonstrates how universities are complicit with white supremacist culture (Harper, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, diversity in the university is commodified and adds value (Ahmed, 2012; Leong, 2013; Melamed, 2014 & 2015). The appearance of diverse bodies creates an illusion that there is unity within difference; on the contrary, this is not the case. Rather, as the scholarship discussed above illustrate, this is a form of exploitation of the university BIPOC community without reflecting structural change to be inclusive or free of violence. Additionally,

when universities recognize the campus community is not composed of non-white individuals, the direction is to diversify the campus community. However, this does not address the violent embedded in the university structure. Ahmed explains, “[b]odies of color provide the organizations with tools, ways of turning action points into outcomes. [BIPOC] become the tools in [universities] kit. [BIPOC] are ticks in the boxes; [BIPOC] tick [the university’s] boxes” (2012, p. 152). The illusion of being diverse does not create change. It disregards the most integral issue universities face, which is white supremacy. Ahmed affirms, “[d]iversity thus involves the aesthetic realm of appearance, as well as the moral realm of value. It creates a body that can be seen and valued as a diverse body. Official descriptions are part of an aesthetic and moral order: *an appearance of valuing*” (2012, p. 59). The appearance of adding value to the university is to benefit who? (Bourke, 2010). When students of color enter a PWI, violence they experience often comes in forms of microaggressions, explicit violence, and lack of support, which minimize their experience (Beasley et al., 2016; McClain & Cokley, 2017), which presents additional barriers. The value added to appear diverse comes at the expense of the endured trauma and exploitation of BIPOC students. Universities capitalize and tokenize BIPOC communities in order to appear diverse without reflecting the hierarchy of the institution or demographics to reflect a diverse body and approach to education.

By pushing diversity and inclusion initiatives, universities appear to commit to diversity efforts. However, most diversity initiatives are vague and rather reflect a ‘tick box’ approach. When the talk of diversity becomes routine, the urgency of inclusive spaces becomes shelved and action is not taken as serious. Ahmed shares, “[s]tatements like ‘we are diverse’ or ‘we embrace diversity’ might simply be what organizations say because that is what organizations are saying. We might call this the ‘lip service’ model of diversity” (2012, p. 57). This lip service

model of diversity is a method to sweep issues under the institutional rug, which does not address the systemic issues. It is also institutional plumbers' responsibility to work through bureaucratic blockages and continue pushing the conversation for results (Ahmed, 2012) in order to create change on campuses. For instance, the creation of a diversity and inclusion center or bringing diverse speakers to campus may be goals of the university, but if students are unaware of it or excludes students to access the resources, the campus climate still remains limited. This begs the question, what does diversity mean or what do universities constitute as diverse initiatives? Regarding diversity statements, Ahmed emphasizes that the "lack of clarity might not be specific to diversity but may reveal the very trouble with description" (2012, p. 55). Is diversity simply about populating diverse bodies or is it about diversifying the praxis to combat institutional violence? While this may be a lingering question, the structure, hierarchy of administration, and student body will continue to influence the ways in which knowledge is produced and shared in the university.

White Supremacy in the University

Predominately white institutions (PWIs) can be understood as higher educational institutions, like colleges and universities, that encompass a student body of 50% or more white students. In these PWIs, white bodies, culture, and practices dominate the institution, which influence engagement on campuses (Beasley et al., 2016). Haynes offers, "all racialized structures, cultivates white supremacy (i.e., normalcy, advantage, privilege, and innocence) through the perpetuation of structures, processes, and traditions that reinforce racial subordination" (2017, p. 88; McFarlane, 1999). Therefore, whiteness as historically engrained in higher educational structures situates material value with whiteness and devalues the interests, experiences, and culture of BIPOC. PWIs respond by avoiding discussion on racism due to a fear

of being perceived as racist or complicit with racism (Harper, 2012) and to not be seen as causing problems within the institution (Ahmed, 2012). Universities that focus on diversity initiatives, without recognizing the institutional racism in PWIs, ignore the systemic violence they perpetuate. Institutions may use the guise of diversity speakers, centers, and initiatives to publicize efforts. White supremacy can appear, for example, through events sponsored by the university and student organizations by inviting speakers whose messages contradict the university's diversity narratives. Another way white supremacy is reflected in the institution is by the lack of ethnic, indigenous, Africana, and Latinx majors and minors offered. Although research on PWIs primarily focus on BIPOC experiences in institutions, there is immense value in exploring the lasting impact on students.

To have the opportunity to attend college is a great privilege, but oftentimes the barriers to success are overlooked. Practically half of all incoming freshmen in a four-year university, never graduate (NCES, 2018). When students transition to college, they encounter various forms of adjustment such as an increased academic load, navigating the university community, building social bonds with peers, managing new stressors and mental health concerns, and unpacking and adapting to a new university identity (Graham & McClain, 2019; McClain et al., 2016). These changes and new experiences disproportionately affect marginalized students, largely BIPOC (Krause et al., 2005). BIPOC students who attend PWIs report a lack of belongingness (Graham & McClain, 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009; Walton & Cohen, 2007). They also experience more hostility (Bourke, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009) and microaggressions (Bourke, 2010), as well as disparities in educational achievement and mental health (Beasley et al., 2016; Bourke, 2010; Graham & McClain, 2019). These experiences impact BIPOC students during their time in the university, but also long-term success to follow

(Graham & McClain, 2019; Hausmann et al., 2007; Shook & Clay, 2012). The institutional violence experienced by BIPOC students demonstrates how PWIs are established to serve and comfort whiteness which is inherently white supremacist (Beasley et al., 2016; Bourke, 2010; Gusa, 2010; Harper, 2012). Bonds and Inwood explain that “white supremacy more precisely describes and locates white racial domination by underscoring the material production and violence of racial structures and the hegemony of whiteness in settler societies” (2016, p. 716). This reflects university culture in ways that universities expect students to transition (Collier & Morgan, 2008) into a specific educational structure that has historically catered to whiteness and coloniality. Consequently, white students have more demonstrated successes (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Beasley et al., 2016; Ellis et al., 2019; Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2017;). Being colorblind or ignorant to whiteness and its implications, is not taking a neutral stance (Beasley et al., 2016; Harper, 2012), but rather being complicit with the violence PWIs produce. Aspects that contribute to white supremacy and institutional racism in PWIs can be reflected, but not limited to, erasure of self (Beasley et al., 2016; Guiffida & Douthit, 2010), silence culture (Ahmed, 2012; Harper, 2012), and martyring university initiatives (Ahmed, 2012).

Universities instill a certain culture for students follow to assimilate on campus in order to facilitate positive outcomes, such as creating space between the student, and family and friends (Guiffida & Douthit, 2010). While this may work in some capacity for white students, this approach disregards the cultural significance family and community have for BIPOC students (Guiffida & Douthit, 2010). There is an expectation for BIPOC students to mimic the socialization of white students assimilating in PWIs in order to be successful and associate positive outcomes (Beasley et al., 2016). Not only does this attempt to erase the understanding of one’s self for BIPOC individuals, it implies that white culture is preferred, dominant, and holds

more value (Beasley et al., 2016). BIPOC students who are able to embrace their culture, negatively impacts a student's belonging in the university (Graham & McClain, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2007). In addition to this experience, universities do not name racism on campus for fear of being complicit with white supremacist violence (Harper, 2012) or denouncing even participating in violence "because [universities] care for these students" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 144). Universities use the language of caring for students to dispel their racial violence complicity (Ahmed, 2012). By using the language of care, universities care more about their image rather than caring for students who are subjected to racial violence. Speaking out against racism in PWIs, not only antecedes institutional injury, but those who are outspoken about racism are labeled as the problem (Ahmed, 2012). PWIs that reject their complicity with racism is a form of gaslighting communities of color, by diverting the blame for calling out racism "because [universities] care for these students" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 144). Universities that do not take accountability for their complicity with violence, rely on the assumption that not centering care for students is incomprehensible.

White supremacy is invested, rooted, and fortified in the structure of the university that are seen and unseen (Ahmed, 2012). When BIPOC students do not acclimate to the white university culture it is met with hostility. Ahmed shares, "[w]hen you stick out, the gaze sticks to you. Sticking out from whiteness can thus reconfirm the whiteness of the space" (2012, p. 40). When BIPOC students are met with racial hostility for not conforming, students can feel alienated, that they do not belong or feel welcomed (Graham & McClain, 2019). By not conforming to whiteness, students are tokenized and are exploited in diversity advertisements. This is demonstrated in BIPOC students finding reprieve in spaces that center BIPOC experiences, such as student organizations, Greek life, and cultural spaces (Bourke, 2010;

Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In establishing safe havens on campus for BIPOC individuals, it is often met with aggression, martyring, and entitlement to use the space (Ahmed, 2012). Even when spaces are designed for BIPOC students to seek refuge from white supremacy, white violence is still pervasive. This can be unpacked by understanding whiteness as property (Bourke, 2010; Ellis et al., 2019). Whiteness as property can be elucidated by ways of entitlement to physical space and protection, and to determine who has access to occupy space and how to occupy it, without explanation (Ellis et al., 2019; Leong, 2013). Harris explains whiteness as property, by “whites have come to expect and rely on [the set of assumption, privileges, and benefits], and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law” (Harris, 1993, p. 1713). When these comforts or privileges do not include white people, such as BIPOC affinity centers, feelings of entitlement are revealed. Therefore, white supremacy functions in the university by revealing the material benefits of whiteness as property. Beasley and colleagues share, “[w]hite supremacy is reflected in the curriculum, traditions, customs and everyday practices of PWIs” (2016, p. 11; Bourke, 2010). White supremacy dictates material, pedagogy, and the way students are conditioned to receive the material (Beasley et al., 2016; Bourke, 2010). There is a need to understand how race and gender norms influence white supremacy and neoliberalism (Inwood & Bonds, 2013). As will be discussed below, feminist praxis may be a response to deter the impact of white supremacy.

Feminist Praxis

Feminist praxis can be defined in a variety of ways. However, for the purpose of this paper, feminist praxis will be understood as the practice of putting feminist theories into action. This can be understood by instituting ways to challenge social structures through values that are intersectional, queer, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and illuminating the ethics of care. The ethics of

care can be understood as having and practicing intense regard for others that is humanistic and nurturing (Bozalek et al., 2014; Noddings, 1984). Feminist praxis centers community, care work, and voice in practice for growth and understanding. For the purpose of this paper, feminist praxis will be understood as the ultimate challenge to systems of oppressions, rather than feel good, tick-box, incremental change without direction for a radical restructuring of institutional practiced violence; it is the essence of change that prompts empathy and results. Feminist praxis centers individual and collective commitment to change starting with being empowered through embodiment, centering voice of marginalized experiences, the deconstruction of hierarchies, and the emphasis on care work (hooks, 1994). The intention to articulate a description of feminist praxis with hooks' scholarship (1994), is to affirm her pursuit for collective liberation within feminist studies.

I understand embodiment as a form of feminist praxis as it situates ourselves, our beliefs, and identities as an expression of resistance to power dynamics. Embodiment is a form of empowerment because situated knowledges are expressed through body and purpose within power structures. hooks shares the need to reject the inheritance of oppression and repression of white male ideals and organized learning in order to prevent the erasure of bodies and knowledges (hooks, 1994). Institutional learning is implemented through a white colonial lens that affirms and promotes whiteness at the expense and exploitation of BIPOC communities (Beasley et al., 2016). When the relationship between politics and identities are further unpacked, structural changes can be made with the collective in mind. For example, when all identities, cultures, and practices are understood and respected, the structure of the university does not prioritize whiteness, but is accountable to the people they serve. Another form of empowerment and feminist praxis is coming to voice. hooks elucidates, “[c]oming to voice is not

just the act of telling one's experience. It is using that telling strategically to come to voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects" (1994, p. 148). Coming to voice is theory in liberatory practice. hooks shares, "one of the most misunderstood aspects of my writing on pedagogy is the emphasis on voice. Coming to voice is not just the act of telling one's experience. It is using that telling strategically to come to voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects" (1994, p. 148). Speaking freely about personal experience and its effects is feminist work that leads to liberation and a deconstruction of oppressive hierarchies (hooks, 1994). Voice as feminist praxis in the university is powerful as it can prompt discussion, educate, and mobilize as a form of resistance to white supremacy situated in university structure and practices. Navigating voice shows up in different ways in the university, but for the scope of this project, voice in the university will be centered.

It is not only the instructor's responsibility to share knowledges, embracing collective learning of shared knowledges demonstrates collective power and is feminist in nature. Sharing knowledge and reclaiming education strengthens community, is empowering, and situates knowledge as a collective effort (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011). Sharing lived knowledge is a form of sharing one's personal experiences and informed knowledge builds community and embraces understandings of difference. Sharing and receiving knowledges within community is an embodied experience that influences how we care and receive others which contributes to feminist praxis (hooks, 1994). This can be strengthened when subjugated knowledge is gained from a multitude of experiences, differences, and voices. When experiential knowledge is shared, it challenges the white colonial structure of the university as a way of decolonizing education as a way to build community. Decolonial education emphasizes community and shared knowledges as feminist and inclusive, and prompts consciousness (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2014). When

decolonial approaches are used in the classroom to promote consciousness raising, they challenge authoritarian white structures embedded in the institution. This approach challenges power dynamics and deconstructs hierarchy in the classroom. Ochoa and Pershing offer an alternative feminist pedagogical praxis as “‘pedagogy of resistance’ that employs Freire’s pivotal concept of ‘conscientization’ and hooks’s emphasis on ‘critical awareness and engagement’” (2011, p. 24; Freire, 1993, p. 36; hooks, 1994, p. 14). Pedagogy of resistance can further be described as a practice of liberation that centers social change and resents power structures or hierarchies. The pedagogy of resistance is feminist praxis because there is action taken to deconstruct hierarchy while informed by liberation. Critical awareness around forms of oppression is an embodied knowledge that can be used to advocate for change and empower voice. Practicing this resistance to violence in forms of power structures, hierarchies, and institutional whiteness, is feminist praxis.

Finally, feminist praxis is established within care and community (Mountz et al., 2015). Mountz and colleagues explain that “care work is work. It is not self-indulgent; it is radical and necessary” (2015, p. 1238; Ahmed, 2014; Federici, 2012; Lorde, 2007). Feminist care work as praxis challenges oppressive institutional practices with the need to care for others and not be complicit with violence. Using a feminist praxis that centers care in the university resists violence which permeates the university and is what holds the university accountable. Care within a feminist praxis not only practices self-care, but care is an extension of a humanistic regard for others.

Institutional Plumbers: Students, Faculty and Staff

Working to change the university to be more inclusive and representative of the campus community is exhausting work. While the neoliberal university emphasizes individualism,

resistance to violent systems, such as, white supremacy, individualism, and multiculturalism, embraces collective identity that is collaborative and invested in solidarity work (Mountz et al., 2015). One person cannot change the university therefore it is vital to emphasize the work of collective change makers which Ahmed coins as “institutional plumbers,” (2012) that work to unclog hindered and inactive diversity initiatives. Institutional plumbers can be comprised of a collective of faculty, students, and staff members that do the monotonous work of policy change with the university, but also work to change the university culture in building community (Ahmed, 2012). This collective of determined individuals holds the university accountable for what can be seen as habit forming which does not create change (Ahmed, 2012). In order to break habits, there needs to be a collective commitment to solidarity rather than an individual prompting change (Ahmed, 2012). A collective commitment to change can build on individual experiences and strengths to solidify efforts and have a multiplicity of strengths. In addition to efforts to work with the university, there needs to be a culture shift within (Ahmed, 2012). This effort comes with the strengthened solidarity between faculty and students, to empower and not exert hierarchal power structures within relationships. This effort comes with the prioritization of care for community (Mountz et al., 2015), empowerment (hooks, 1994), and critical awareness (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011) around institutional failings, like white supremacy.

Building community within an institution presents barriers for everyone seeking solidarity. In an approach to build community between students and faculty, faculty are seen as suspicious for caring, building relationships, and supporting students (hooks, 1994, p. 198). This demonstrates the university hierarchy and power relations that enforces individualism and discourages a community invested in care for others. Institutions operate in a traditional fashion where change is not accepted and operating in uniform fashion is prioritized (hooks, 1994).

Building community and developing a collaborative learning environment where faculty release power and students are empowered, a ‘pedagogy of resistance’ can be fostered (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011, p. 24). This also prompts conversations to decolonize knowledge by “collectively remaking the university” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1244). A pedagogy of resistance deconstructs power within a collective identity, urges critical awareness around systems of oppression, and builds community (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011). In order to challenge the classroom environment as hierarchical and build community, faculty must impose a variety of pedagogical approaches (Beasley et al., 2016), such as engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), emancipatory pedagogy, (Beasley et al., 2016) and improvisational teaching (Zapata et al., 2019), to name a few. When hierarchy of power is challenged in the classroom, everyone is empowered and a humanistic learning environment can support growth at all levels (hooks, 1994). When community is formed in the classroom, students have a distributed commitment to education, are allowed space for their voices, and everyone is valued (hooks, 1994). Faculty can challenge the individualized neoliberal learning experience by resisting institutional structures to education (Mountz et al., 2015) and advocating for community (hooks, 1994). When community is established in the classroom, students and faculty can be vulnerable and share personal narratives to gain a better understanding of the differences brought to the university (hooks, 1994). By collectively educating as a class community, faculty offer care and empathy for students and peers (hooks, 1994). As shared by Ochoa and Pershing, a pedagogy of resistance challenges the violence that systems produce (2011) and centers care in a feminist praxis. Care in scholarship and pedagogy supports the need to resist violence in the institution (Mountz et al., 2015) and prompts social action (Beasley et al., 2016) for liberation and freedom (hooks, 1994).

Students who are empowered and resist institutional violence, demonstrate efforts to transform the university to serve the masses (Ryan, 2004). Student activism has been engrained in higher education for decades and often leads to social change (Ryan, 2004). Those who are committed to university change are informed by diversity, struggle and sacrifice by peers, community members, and injustice in the university. In order to challenge the commodification of non-white bodies in the university, student activism can elucidate the urgency for change. Inwood and Bonds share that “antiracist organizing is politically and theoretically imperative for anti-capitalist politics” (2013, p. 517). It can be understood that there will always be an organizing aspect in order to ignite change when dealing with systems of violence, such as capitalism and white supremacy.

Positionality and Methods

Positionality of Researcher

My inspiration to do this research is the experience I have from my activist peers, BIPOC centered university initiatives, and my research experience on feminist pedagogies. This research drives me to further grapple the ways in which whiteness influences academic power structures and how feminist scholarship and praxis challenge whiteness. As a scholar and activist, I am influenced by my paralleled experience with Ahmed's scholarship *On Being Included* (2012). However, I wanted to further learn how feminist praxis disrupts the violence the university embodies. Ahmed coins the term "institutional plumbers" to note the primary players, such as faculty, staff, and students, in the university who do work to deconstruct whiteness, challenge the diversity narrative, and center BIPOC voices (2012). Therefore, this research centers institutional plumbers that fight for institutional change in PWIs.

As a white scholar doing research on whiteness and white supremacy, I am afforded privileges that BIPOC researchers would not be provided. For example, when proposing this research to my department and IRB, I was not questioned about my intent of the research or how I would be interpreting the results of this study. Additionally, when reaching out to prospective participants, no participant questioned my motives, how I would be interpreting results, or my experience in this field of study. It would be irresponsible as a feminist researcher not to share this observation. As an anti-racist racist contributing to feminist scholarship, I am aware of my contribution to white supremacy in the university and as someone who has benefited from white supremacist institutions and affirmative action policies. While I am not fully aware of the impact my whiteness had on BIPOC participants in this study, I recognize the place of assumed authority I was privileged during interviews. Additionally, I am aware of the inherent racism I

pose as a white persxn contributing to anti-racist scholarship in PWIs. I am accountable to my whiteness and to BIPOC individuals who have invested emotional labor in educating me. By being accountable to BIPOC emotional labor, I intend to prioritize space in this research to elevate BIPOC voices, narratives, and experiences. By naming my whiteness and the implications of doing this research, my aim is to challenge the structure of white supremacy in the university and provide an understanding of how white educators can be more informed of the violence they cause in the university. White educators and university administrators should be accountable for their whiteness to further inform their approach to education as anti-racist racists. Anti-racist racists will be identified as white individuals who approach racial difference with an anti-racist lens, but because of white supremacy are inherently racist.

To reflect on my own experience as an anti-racist scholar, my experience has led me to challenge the impact I have in the university by fighting to dismantle racist structures in the classroom and departments. As a feminist and activist undergraduate student, I participated in various actions demanding policy change and sat on committees to advocate for change from within and outside the system. As a staff member at a private institution, I supported BIPOC students through mentoring and supporting organizations, while also fighting against white supremacist speakers and nearly losing my job. As a graduate student instructor, I have incorporated a multitude of feminist pedagogical approaches that center activism, empowerment, and community-based learning in the classroom. In my role as an instructor, I challenged classroom hierarchies, prioritized BIPOC scholarship, and challenged whiteness and coloniality in course materials.

Problem Statement

Universities center the white experience in their structure through white curriculum, white policies, and initiatives that prioritize the comfort of white people (Ahmed, 2012; Beasley et al., 2016). There is a clear need to make universities more inclusive so higher education is accessible to everyone, specifically BIPOC students. Feminist praxis suggests ways to challenge the neoliberal PWI through embodiment (hooks, 1994), voice (hooks, 1994), collective shared knowledge (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011; Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2014), deconstructing hierarchies (hooks, 1994; Ochoa & Pershing, 2011) and care (hooks, 1994; Mountz et al., 2015). With feminist praxis, researchers can further unpack the tools needed to disempower racial capitalism, white supremacy, and violence the university perpetuates. The purpose of this research is to analyze the tools or skills used by institutional plumbers (Ahmed, 2012) to disrupt white supremacy in both public and private institutions in a segregated urban environment in the American Midwest.

To guide this research, I posed the following questions: (1) What is the relationship between universities and white supremacy?; (2) How do institutional plumbers resist university violence?; (3) What feminist approaches are used to combat white supremacy?; (4) How do feminist approaches vary between institutional plumbers—faculty, staff, and students—in the university?; (5) How do public and private university initiatives vary in their support to BIPOC students?

Feminist Research Methods

This research study was approved by IRB in December 2019. In order to assure anonymity and protect the participants of the study, the location and names of the two universities in this study will not be shared. One university is a state funded public institution,

and the other university is a religious private institution. Both are located in the same midsized American Midwestern city. They have comparable student populations and would be considered mid-sized universities. Both universities are predominately white institutions with a student population of over 50% white.

This qualitative approach to research was conducted through semi-structured interviews. I decided to approach this research through qualitative methods because I felt strongly there was a need to elevate participants' voices and agency. Qualitative methods afford the opportunity to participants to be recognized for their experiences. Muñoz and Maldonado (2012) emphasize the importance of narratives in research as a form of capital. Participants recruited for this study included faculty, staff, and students who were actively involved in activism, anti-racist scholarship, or utilized feminist pedagogical approaches in teaching. I use Sara Ahmed's (2012) term "institutional plumbers" to emphasize the work that faculty, staff, and students do at the university to create an inclusive and liberatory space. Muñoz and Maldonado (2012) offer the example of counterstories as a form of qualitative method. They share, "the term counterstories has been used to refer to the stories told by those who are marginalized about their own experiences, stories which are not often told, acknowledged, or valued...counterstories account for resistance in the struggle for equity" (2012, p. 295). The voices elevated in this research demonstrate the experiential value that can be revealed through interviews in scholarship.

The first round of recruitment of participants was based on their research or publicized anti-racist or community-based work. Following their recruitment, more participants were recruited through snowball sampling or based on the recommendation of the interviewed participants. Institutional plumbers were recruited through their university emails, and I shared the proposed interview questions, consent form, and offered my insight as to why they were a

good fit for this research. All interviews were conducted over two months from February to March in 2020.

Five interviews were conducted per university, resulting in a total of ten interviews. Two students per university were recruited for this study, resulting in a total of four students. The students in this study had varying backgrounds with respect to race, gender, and age. Two faculty members per university were recruited for this study, resulting in a total of four faculty members. The faculty in this study had varying backgrounds with respect to gender and tenure status; all identified as white. Faculty members ranged in their lifespan at the university from five years to fifteen years. All faculty held positions in the college that centered the arts and humanities, where they situated their field of study in anti-racism, anti-colonial, literature, and empowerment. One staff member per university were recruited for this study, resulting in a total of two staff members. Staff members had various gender identities, one staff member identified as racially ambiguous, mixed and of Indigenous Maaya and European descent, and the second participant identified as white. Staff members' time of employment ranged from eleven months to seven and a half years in their current positions. Both staff members had responsibilities ranging from administrative duties to student support. All participants of this study were over the age of 18. The purpose of having institutional plumbers be centered in this study is to reflect prior research supporting feminist work such as, diversity and care work to challenge whiteness in institutions (Ahmed, 2012).

Upon meeting institutional plumbers for in-person interviews, I offered a positionality statement so they were aware of the roles I currently and previously held in the university (See **Appendix A**). I was transparent about adversity I experienced as a first generation college student, my whiteness, and the impact it would have in this study. Before starting the interviews,

consent forms were reviewed with the participants, and I offered clarity and assurance on their anonymity in the project. The future aims of this research was shared with the context that it may be submitted for publications and as part of my thesis research. Before recording the interviews, I received a second confirmation to proceed with interviewing. A copy of the posed interview questions was shared with institutional plumbers a week prior to their interview, and follow-up questions were offered and rephrased during the interview process (**See Appendix B**).

The results of this study draws on ten interviews, ranging in length from approximately 40 to 90 minutes and an average of 65 minutes per interview. These interviews were audio-recorded and took place in my private office or an office space that was convenient for the participants. This was a necessary element in my approach because I wanted the participants to feel comfortable in the space of their choosing. Pseudonyms were offered by the participants themselves or were given by myself in order to protect anonymity. When interviews concluded, I was responsible for transcribing the audio which took approximately a month. Transcriptions were then coded through line-by-line analysis to pull themes and quotes which directed the results of this study.

It was important to me to keep my research sample small and limit five participants per university because I wanted to unpack narratives in detail rather than overshadow any participant's voice. Feminist methods emphasize the need to bring voices forward. In this study I understand the interviews as counterstories (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012) to hone in on the voices and agency of the participants. As mentioned before, the objective for this research was not only to fulfill a graduation requirement, but to start a dialogue on necessary institutional change. Those who contribute to anti-racist scholarship in the university and academy are frequently overshadowed, not given a voice, or their scholarship is dismissed. Counterstories

provide the opportunity to offer experiential knowledge that challenges the performative language in academia and calls for change (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Not only is this research feminist scholarship, it is activist work to be referenced for future scholars to continue the work of dismantling the oppressive structure of the university.

Findings

The overall findings of this study responds to some of the research questions posed, such as the relationship between white supremacy and institutions, and the varied feminist praxis used to resist or disrupt institutional violence by institutional plumbers. The results did not necessarily address the various initiatives to support BIPOC students, as this was not a central focus of the study. However, I learned more about the differences in the structure of the universities themselves. The following five chapters will discuss (1) the role white supremacy has in PWIs, (2) the differences in public and private PWIs, (3) the ways disruption and activism are used to resist violence, (4) the ways that feminist praxis was used to combat white supremacy and institutional violence, and will conclude with (5) suggestions to improve the university as an anti-racist institution and an alternative approach to education. I will end the paper with a discussion about the limitations of the study. Most central to note, the study draws on a small sample and reflects one particular city in the Midwest, which may not be reflective of the composition of the United States. The purpose of this paper is thus not to draw on generalizing conclusions, but rather shed important light on the particular experiences and critical work of institutional plumbers resisting white supremacy at two urban universities. My research highlights these voices to promote an urgency for social and institutional change.

Chapter 1: White Supremist Institutions

“It’s a white supremacist nation”

White supremacy shows up in numerous ways in the institution, through the structure, interpersonal exchanges, the curriculum, and within hierarchies. To address this, universities are obligated to take a stance against violence, however, their approach by distributing materials and university content, creating centers, and delivering diversity statements, creates a culture that maintains power and silences or erases the voices who are most affected. Joan, a tenured faculty member at a private institution shared:

White supremacy is a culture that assigns value to white people’s thoughts, perceptions, and experiences as the ones that are right, that are the ones to be valued or the ones that are meaningful, while assigning material benefits to people based on whiteness. Naturalizing organizations of resources that benefit white people as a group and as individuals. White supremacy takes many forms, it’s in the air we breathe, in predominately white institutions, it’s in the curriculum. It’s in the leadership structure, it’s in supporting a world that naturalizes the supremacy.

Based on Joan’s definition, white supremacy centers the experience, resources, and places value on white individuals, culture, and structure. The university lacks accountability to create an inclusive and equitable environment for BIPOC individuals and therefore is complicit in sustaining white supremacy in the institution. To understand white supremacy’s impact on the university and the university community, this chapter will unpack white supremacy, the university’s framing of diversity, institutional hierarchy, and how the university lacks accountability.

White Supremacy in the University

Participants in this study highlighted how white supremacy was embedded in the structure of the university, the devaluing of labor of the university community, and the exploitation of the BIPOC community.

Angela, a tenured faculty member, shared, “If you’re not challenging, everything’s participating in [white supremacy], in any case where it’s not being challenged.” By the university lacking an approach to confront white supremacy, the university would be considered participating in white supremacy. Additionally, the university has a way of recreating white supremacy through its meaning and status. Joan offered:

[University education is] a way of reproducing white power and white supremacy as if it’s meritocratic by making a college education stand for and in fact be a pass to greater economic and social mobility and status; while creating a funding structure and a culture and a testing into system and a grading system that will always, always, always favor people who already have the power and so, white majorities... It’s a white supremacist institution. Its meritocracy washes white supremacy and all the inequalities of wealth et cetera that go with that.

The university recreates whiteness by creating a status that is perceived to lead to social mobility. This is also an example of understanding whiteness as assigning material value (Harper, 2012) or whiteness as property (Harris, 1993). However, universities are not transparent in their intentions to preference whiteness. While white supremacist institutions seek to conceal their intentions, William, a tenure track faculty member, was transparent about the larger impact white supremacy has on society. He stated that:

White supremacy is embedded in the United States, it is a white supremacist nation. Look at our political system, look at the infrastructure of the university, look at the infrastructure of any corporation. Everything is embedded upon the white male... You’re occupying that hierarchy within that patriarchy within a white supremacist nation. We see it play out, whether it’s police brutality, police killings, again, [the university] administration... just look at the face of the administration and they’ll tell you a lot. But also, what it comes down to is it comes down to money. White supremacy is ultimately tied up with capitalism because those things are what matter the most to the university.

William shared the relationship between the university’s intent to preserve whiteness and capitalism. This directly relates to the discourse shared by Leong (2013) that there is a desire to preserve whiteness in racial capitalist pursuits. Teddii, a graduate student, also highlighted the relationship between capital and creating change on campus for the BIPOC community. He

emphasized, “[benefactors] are prioritizing the benefit and the economical need versus what your students need...bodies of color and other marginalized identities just seems to always have to take the sacrifice in order for whiteness to prevail or persist.” Rather than creating a campus that is supportive to BIPOC students and faculty, universities prioritize the financial benefits over structural change. Tokenizing the BIPOC experience only supports financial gain for the university, not for those who are exploited in the process. Not only does white supremacy define the university, it is embedded in its structure through its interactions with institutional plumbings.

Faculty witness the university prioritizing research over the student experience through a lack of value in teaching and community building. Susan, a tenured faculty member, shared, “I’m not sure that teaching is valued in the university. I mean they say that it is, but I’m not sure that it’s reflected in the rewards systems.” There is a lack of value of the labor faculty put into teaching and cultivating knowledge, where faculty are not rewarded for educating. Susan went on to describe:

The top thing college students say about why they stay in college, regardless of their race, is about a faculty mentor. We know that, let’s just say for example, Black students thrive with Black faculty mentors. Well, Black studies departments are where a disproportionate amount of Black faculty are found. So here’s a role that they’re filling, it isn’t about enrollment in their courses or majors in their courses, but serves the whole university. I think sort of taking a colorblind approach to funding departments is an example of reinforcing white supremacy.

Not only does the university reinforce white supremacy by exploiting the emotional labor of Black faculty members, there is a lack of value in the additional labor Black faculty assert by mentoring students. Angela, a tenured faculty member, further explains the process in which the university approaches the expectations of the university and how it relates to the reward system. She shared:

The faculty positionality is this thing of, here’s what you get valued on and a lot of the time it’s publications, publications, publications, even though my department has a policy

where we are supposed to be putting 40% of time into research, 40% teaching, 20% service. Like A, I don't actually do that, other people actually don't do that either. Even though we have that policy like it's really hard to get service actually recognized for what it is.

There is a lack of recognition for the service and emotional labor faculty, specifically BIPOC faculty, put into caring for students. Mentorship and guidance within the university challenges the expected neoliberal white approach. which directs students to campus resources and advising, but is also necessary to retain students. Mentorship is rooted in an ethics of care that centers affirmation, encouragement, shared wisdom, and is reciprocal (Lucey & White, 2017). This elucidates the disconnect within expectations of faculty in the institution but will also be further described in **Chapter 4**.

While faculty's labor is exploited, Landback, a staff member, described their experience in navigating the institutional hierarchy, specifically when addressing a letter they wrote on BIPOC student needs. They said:

We did not say demand because people felt strongly that we can't say demand. That's not polite *laugh* we were like, no then the white people are just going to be mad and they're not going to even get through the thing. Like that came up. Like if we say this, they're just going to be angry and not even like going to want to read it. We're trying to appeal to white people's fragility, humanity, no not humanity, yeah appeal to their fragility. Which is ridiculous!

This is additional labor for BIPOC staff members to navigate in the white supremacist institution, in order to raise awareness for BIPOC students' needs. Rather than calling out the cause of many of the concerns BIPOC students experience, such as white supremacy, there is a need to accommodate white individuals within the white supremacist hierarchy. This will be unpacked further in this chapter.

Navigating the institution as a BIPOC individual presents additional barriers, such as finding a mentor that has an understanding on how to navigate the institution and provide

support. Kourtney, a graduate student, described that “[students are] not feeling supported. Feeling like you’re on an island by yourself. Even having a really good advisor which I feel like the majority of the people that I talk to do have a really good advisor, that’s one person.” By students not feeling supported, or only being able to rely on one advisor for emotional support, there is a disconnect in the care the university claims to have for its students. In addition to the lack of support, students often experience faculty violence within the institution. Teddii described the impact he felt after a white, male faculty member gaslit him in front of his peers in a graduate seminar. He shared:

I felt like he won and I even explained that to my abuelita and she’s telling me you’re not crazy, and it’s like I know I’m not crazy but it makes me feel crazy. Because I don’t feel like I’m being validated, I don’t feel like anyone’s confirming what I’m saying. And you kind of made me feel like I just made this shit up when I know I didn’t. When I confronted you, you really made me feel like I just made this up. Like I just came in with this whole elaborate story of what happened and now I feel some type of way about it. Like no this is what you did and take on. I never asked for an apology, I don’t want one. Because you said what you said, and you meant that.

While there is some support in mentorship from some faculty, there is a paralleled violence in the classroom. This example of a violent encounter with a white faculty member and the faculty member not taking accountability for his action, speaks to a gaslighting culture in academia that has a detrimental impact on BIPOC students. Rose, a staff member, described how the university police approach non-white students. She shared, “when you look at leadership with it being mostly white men, when people of color are targeted more by the police or seen as aggressive comparatively to their white students. The very fact of stating you want diversity, it’s more like you want diverse bodies and not shifting culturally, it’s going to perpetuate oppression on a lot of levels.” The university policing BIPOC bodies speaks to these racist attitudes that preserve white supremacy and white power in the university culture. Although there are numerous accounts to

offer, I chose an experience William had at an event he helped organize for Indigenous students.

He shared:

There was a healing circle for boarding school survivors and suicide that was done on campus two years ago. There's a reason that it's not done any more...the reason that we did the healing circle that we don't do anymore is because your typical bros, white, [cis] male, would go past us because we were in [a public space on campus], and the bros would yell insults and stereotypes as we were doing that. Things like 'go back home,' I was on full on rage mode so like I started to block that stuff out. I actually left the circle for a time to go challenge those students, tell them to be respectful, but it didn't do any good.

The violence William witnessed from an Indigenous centered event where there was no intervention to mitigate the violence, demonstrates the relationship between individualized violence and the systemic violence the university protects. The university protects and cultivates white supremacy and demonstrates it is not a safe space for BIPOC students. William's effort to create and cultivate a space of healing for boarding school survivors was met with additional violence from students on campus. While diversity initiatives attempt to create an appearance of inclusivity as a branding opportunity, it neglects to be transparent of the violent culture the university perpetuates.

Diversity

While the previous section discusses how white supremacy is manifested and expressed within universities, this section focuses on the initiatives presented by the university that attempts to center the BIPOC community. Neither the public nor the private institution had an explicit anti-racist or anti-white supremacist stance on racism within the institution, but attempts to portray an inclusive campus through the language of diversity, developing centers, and offering diversity statements.

When discussing diversity, participants often discussed racial or ethnic diversity and the fragility they experienced from discussions. Teddii shared:

Everybody is so close knit in their sense of their sensitivity to dealing with their discomfort and nobody wants to be called a racist or be associated to any of the isms for God sake, but they're protecting themselves, they're protecting whiteness and their fragility is showing. Eventually it's going to come crashing down because now these stories are coming to light more.

Teddii alluded to the fact that while there are more race-based incidents being known or shared, the main concern for the university is its appearance. The university lacks accountability and is silent for fear of being perceived as racist. For example, some of the institutional plumbers pointed to the university prioritization of their branding rather than investing in inclusive and equitable spaces. Joan shared:

Students realize that the university sees them as they're for the university's purposes, rather than for their own education, well-being and empowerment. For helping them look better, have better numbers, look better, get more students there by giving kind of a superficial appearance of diversity, so in the promotional and add materials, or by recruiting other students of color so that there's more, bringing the bodies into the classroom or into the university. I still think that it's mostly for the white students. White students feel like they're getting a little diversity in classrooms. Instrumental for the white students, instrumental for university's branding of itself as an urban institution.

Joan expressed the use of non-white bodies being on campus as a branding tool for the university. There is a clear disconnect here by recruiting non-white bodies without providing an equitable space for BIPOC students to learn and grow without being exploited. To further emphasize the disposability of BIPOC students, William shared, "[diversity] is propaganda for them... any poster you see, you see your token person of color and they will talk about diversity in their statements, in the public, on their website, talk about diversity, talk about their diversity statement, which means nothing... Diversity is all being used as a shadow." To use diversity as a recruitment tactic to get more bodies of difference on campus shows how the university tokenizes difference for capital gain and not for genuine care or understanding for racially

marginalized students. Angela also voiced how she saw the university implement diversity. She shared, “I would define diversity as garbage. I am somebody who finds that a lot of multicultural inclusion is really questionable, because of the way it gets implemented...there’s so much about the way that it gets implemented, that it is lip service and it’s not actually doing the stuff it needs to do.” Angela shared that the lip service of diversity is demonstrating there are non-white bodies on campus. Diversity lip service is a way to keep up branding (Ahmed, 2012) which does not address the needs or services offered to BIPOC students. When the needs of BIPOC students are not being met but appearances are kept up, the university is complicit with violence by not serving their students.

Another promotional branding approach to diversity and inclusion is by the founding and opening of centers. Kourtney shared:

They make centers and then the really special centers get a research center, which makes them have budgets. Because some of the centers have a center but they don’t really have a significant enough budget to be able to do the type of programming that could possibly create a sense of belonging. They have enough to kind of serve the people who identify. If I was going to have a center of Black women’s excellence, I should not only have enough budget to serve Black women who are in this space, but enough budget to create relationship and to make space for people to interact, learn about the people who are on this campus who identify in that way; and what it means for them to be here.

While the institution uses centers that are intended to support non-white students, there is a disconnect from what that support means. If there is not an operational budget to support the campus community to serve students that make up the demographic, then what is the center’s purpose? The performative nature of centers without documented avenues of support for students demonstrates the university does not center the students, but is a branding opportunity (Ahmed, 2012). The performativity of centers affirms how diversity fails. Ahmed shares that, “diversity can expose the whiteness of those who are already in place. To diversify an institution becomes an institutional action insofar as the necessity of the action reveals the absence or failure of

diversity” (2012, p. 33). Universities demonstrate that their attempt to diversify only tokenizes BIPOC students in centers where they seek resources, which exposes the problem of whiteness.

The final aspect of diversity performance this section will highlight is the university diversity statement. When asking participants in this study about their diversity statement, it was largely met with laughter or a deep sigh, that brought clarity to the lack of urgency, commitment, and transparency of providing an inclusive space for students of racial difference. Participants did not take the university diversity statement serious, as it lacked a clear commitment.

McKenzie, a graduate student and lecturer, shared, “if I was grading [the diversity statement], I would be like, give me an example. I want something to make it more concrete.” This lack of clear description or commitment was affirmed by all participants. Lily, an undergraduate student, shared, “if our diversity statement is that everyone is welcome and they belong here, then we need to back that up with our actions as well. Otherwise what does it even mean?” Lily raised a valid question, what does it mean to have a statement that is not backed up with action? Ahmed articulates, “[w]hen diversity becomes a value for the organization, it allows the accumulation of organizational value. My argument here has been in becoming embedded in performance culture, equality can participate in concealing inequalities” (2012, p. 110). The appearance of university action may portray work is being done, but the narrative of equality actually conceals that inequality. Landback unpacked this further by emphasizing the lack of value of BIPOC students by not contributing financially to create a diverse and inclusive space. They shared:

In terms of the university, they just start putting together words that mean literally nothing. That’s their statement on diversity, or that’s their guiding value on diversity...reiterating that they value stuff, but then not putting any money towards or even if they do sometimes, it’s putting money towards solutions or initiatives that don’t fucking work. That continues to contribute to upholding the system. I feel until the leadership changes, there will be no real large-scale cultural shifts on campus as it’s related to campus climate or diversity or inclusion or engagement.

Landback pointed out that diversity statements were hollow commitments without action. They also highlighted that initiatives have not worked which contribute to upholding white supremacy. This raises critical questions on how the universities go about deciding these initiatives and if they are including the BIPOC community in the decision-making. Without a large-scale cultural shift on campus to be inclusive of BIPOC identities, one can question the intention to provide a safe space to all students. This parallels with Joan's observation to access knowledges of non-white individuals. Does the university value non-white experiences and knowledge or is it for the disposal of white students and the administration to be capitalized on? Joan further articulated:

Diversity becomes this way of taking social movement goals of radically democratizing the university and turning them into institutional goals of creating a sprinkling of diversity at universities so that white students can feel like they're good managers of situations that they might be in where they also encounter people of color. The university is a time where you experience, learn a little bit about racial difference for white students and are enriched by it. So diversity as defined by the university and is defined by law, in the wake of social movement demands, is really a very limited, limiting, misunderstanding of the goals of anti-racist movements. I see it as a containment word, a management word.

Joan affirmed what Melamed (2014) describes as access to diverse bodies being used for the benefit of white individuals "to manage human differences of race, ethnicity, gender, culture and national origin" (p. 87) in the workplace. Joan sheds light on the use of diversity as a containment word and not one used to embrace difference or collective knowledge sharing. Landback affirmed this by saying, "I would describe [the diversity statement] as a well-intentioned white person." A well-intentioned white person in this circumstance, is the university made up of a hierarchy of whiteness attempting to create a diverse body but not fully understanding or caring about the violence whiteness causes.

Institutional Hierarchy

The previous section discussed the ways in which the institution uses diversity to conceal issues white supremacy creates. While attempting to address white supremacy through a diversity narrative, it ignores the white supremacist hierarchy in place. Institutional plumbers shared how institutional hierarchy is depicted in the university by maintaining power, fostering a silencing culture, and creating a maze for institutional plumbers to navigate in their attempt to report violence.

Universities operate through hierarchy when decisions for change or initiatives come down to a vote with the board of regents. Joan described:

Universities are in a very repressive pacified mode right now. Everything goes down to the board and we have a really bad board right now. We have like a board with a cabal in it, a four or five hedge white male hedge fund people who do not want to be re-educated around who they think is fully human, important, valuable and who they feel should feel lucky and grateful to be there.

Joan emphasizes her university board's lack of awareness and accountability to violence. It reveals that those who make structural change decisions are unaware and refuse to be informed about student needs and identities. Hierarchy in the university as it currently exists demonstrates the cycle of unwillingness to change and cultivate community with students (hooks, 1994).

When the decision to value the BIPOC community is presented, the question of funding is brought into decision making. Rather than challenge whiteness in the university, tokenizing promotional material offered an alternative narrative. Kourtney affirmed this by sharing, "I think the university prioritizes reputation and then probably money, money might go first then reputation." Capitalism and controlling the narrative of the institution demonstrate what is important to the university, therefore anything that threatens whiteness is a threat to the

institution. Teddii gives the example of an established image his university portrays to control the narrative of the institution, without context to its history. He shared:

There was an Indigenous person on [this image] originally. The person was cropped out just to have [a religious figure] or whoever he is just to be that center of that [image]...it's kind of like they take pride in it. The erasure of Indigenous history and even thinking about the land that they're on and how that contributes to that conversation... I think it shows the control. How they can manipulate a situation even documents, that's a manipulation of a tool that they are using. And they're basically saying that they can do this whenever they feel like it. They have that type of power because nobody is going to step in, nobody's going to say something. Even if you do say something, you don't have enough capital and I don't just mean the sense of finance. You don't have enough capital to challenge that and be successful in that regard... These are the things that they're doing. They don't have respect for this land, granted they want us to pray on this land and we are a [religious] institution. It doesn't relate. It shows the extension of power and what power can look like in a multitude of different ways.

Teddii's example of an image on his campus demonstrates the ability of the university to control the narrative, the university's erasure of Indigenous communities, and how there is a lack of respect for land and BIPOC culture. This example emphasizes the lack of regard for and erasure of its BIPOC community and the power behind maintaining a white supremacist hierarchy. Joan described the university maintaining hierarchy by stating, "the university will try to erase you from the space, but what it feels like is a negation of identity, self and humanity." With the university controlling the narrative and not taking accountability for its position of maintaining power, it erases the identities and experiences of the BIPOC community and is manipulating the situation to fit the narrative of instilling whiteness. Lily shared her experience when issues are raised to the institution. She said, "when [students] bring concerns to administration and the university, they're sometimes not acknowledged as largely and as seriously as they should be. I know that sometimes too, issues can be swept under the rug." Lily emphasized the university's lack of concern for student needs and rights. It demonstrates the lack of urgency for student concerns and how the university does not value their students. It raises the question if the

university cares about its students at all. Rose shared, “I’m just much more action oriented and I’m not sure I’m seeing the action at the rate that I would like to see it.” While some may say change takes time, Rose’s experience points to the lack of urgency behind structural change within the university.

While the university controls the narrative, the university silences the concerns raised by students by creating barriers to report violence. Kourtney shared her experience in navigating violence in the institution by saying:

I was vocal. I sent a ranting raving email to everyone I could possibly think of...To meet with the dean of students, you have to meet with somebody who decides if you get to meet with the dean of students. So I did that. I want to say for almost four weeks, like I’m done explaining this, I want to talk to the dean of students and I never got through. So I ended up emailing and emailing somebody else and emailing so many people. I think I just ranted in a way with the type of language that sounded like this could get bad, because she’s still going. And now she’s like, like y’all have me messed up, who else do I need to talk to. Should I be talking to somebody outside the university, would that be more helpful?...I think that it became a risk to not answer. The answers to the problems were still very nonchalant about the actual issue. There were people in the midst to be able to be like, I can help you solve this problem, like we can I can tell you the steps you need to take to make sure that it goes away, but nobody actually addressed the issue. Or took any responsibility for how it happened or what it looked like. And so, it’s not in your best interest to disrupt things necessarily. You’re not necessarily going to be successful. The amount of circles I ran in, It just made me feel like I don’t want to go here anymore.

The university creates a maze to keep those who are most marginalized preoccupied with bureaucracy, rather than commit to changing its culture. The university uses this maze tactic to push issues under the rug, alluding to what Lily shared, and discouraged Kourtney to continue reporting violence. Rather than being accountable to change, the university prioritizes the status quo and its power.

Lacking Accountability

The university lacks accountability to change any of its white supremacist structure and demonstrates its unwillingness to disrupt established hierarchies. Angela raised the question, “is there any accountability? I don’t know any accountability practices. They do undergraduate program reviews and they ask questions. But I’ve seen those in a lot of programs, it’s like we just don’t have data and nothing happens and then the review ten years later again and nothing happens.” While there are procedures in place to ignite change, there is a lack of agency and interest on the university’s behalf to concretely apply those changes. The university is also not accountable to its violent past, as Teddii offered through his insights on the promotional image of the university. Angela brought awareness to the lack of transparency of the university’s history, too. She offered how the institution’s “origins build on colonialism, Black labor, unfree labor of any kind, like racialized unfree labor. I don’t think we had slave labor building this, but we know from the time, we know that there’s been racism since day one of white people showing up here.” When the university refuses to acknowledge and address its history based on racial and colonial violence, it institutes the structural unwillingness to be accountable or transparent about its violence.

White supremacy shows up in the university structure through interpersonal interactions with its institutional plumbers who advocate for change. While the BIPOC community and its allies navigate the system to create structural change, the university still controls the bureaucratic steps to prevent change. While the institution is set up to specifically support whiteness, there is some differences between public and private institutions in how they prioritize their image which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Public vs. Private

“Aren’t universities supposed to center students?”

When I began this study, one of the research questions posed was: How do public and private university initiatives vary in their support to BIPOC students? Although there were not clear distinctions between institutional support to BIPOC students, there was some overlap and distinctions around the space of the institution. Institutional plumbers in this study discussed how public and private universities similarly did not reflect city-wide demographics. However, they varied with their priorities for recruitment to the university and campus environment.

Overlapping Structure

When asked about diversity within the institution, several institutional plumbers took pauses, laughed or questioned the question asked. Susan offered with laughter, “You hear a lot in the [public] university about being more diverse compared to other universities in the area and yet that’s a very low bar.” This demonstrates the similarities between universities and the space they provide for non-white students. Similarly, to university demographics, staff, and faculty members struggled to see the comparison between the university and the city demographics. Landback shared, “race and ethnicity, [the numbers] are not reflective of [the city]” and William said that he wanted “to see the student population look more like [the city], it needs to. That goes to the same for faculty [demographics].” This demonstrates there is a disconnect between the university’s student body and the demographics of the city.

Public Institution

Institutional plumbers highlighted three clear distinctions between the public institution and the private institution. The state funded public institution was described as being a Research

1 (R1) institution, being a campus primarily of commuter students, and that students' social circles were racially segregated.

Every university has different priorities, but for the urban public university in this study, having R1 status was described to be an elevated priority by participants. Kourtney offered:

[The university] being a Research 1. Which is a thing, I get it. But like that's what is important to you? How you got to a Research 1 is a completely different conversation and I think a lot of people don't know how they got there. The people who got you there would be students and none of them felt like 'I'm like so excited about [the university] being a Research 1 because of all of the hard work that I did.' I don't think any student feels like that. So, you don't prioritize the student's feelings or belonging, but you do prioritize the title.

As a graduate student, Kourtney did not receive much from the university being an R1 and also described how the university did not prioritize students feeling belonging in the university. There is a disconnect between how the university brands itself, versus how the university actually implements care to be sustaining. Angela also discussed the pace of her public university, she said, "R1 is grant money and PhD students put out. So there's a disconnect. So I think a lot of it has to do with tradition and the kind of glacial pace of the institutions changing. Pursuit of status, like people want a certain status and you get the promotion." The university was also centering its status and image for promotion, without looking at the overall impact on faculty well-being. The university operating within the traditional realms of change does not prompt change, it upholds a sedentary pace. While the focus of a R1 centers the university image, there is a lack of change and support for students that does not cultivate a sense of belonging, which is necessary for student retention (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2017).

Another aspect participants mentioned about their public institution was that it was largely a commuter campus. When discussing student activism, Landback shared, "at [the university], I feel like the involvement is lower on campus. Because a lot of people, they just

come here to go to class and then go home. Their home isn't a dorm and their home isn't an apartment around the corner, so they have a level of separation." With the lack of activism on campus, students are able to have a level of separation by leaving campus to go home, rather than being isolated on campus.

The last aspect participants shared about their public university was how social groups were racially segregated. Lily voiced her experience with observing student social circles and said, "there are some groups of students that when they do have a lot of [racial and ethnic] similarities, they do stick together... a lot of times people who are not within those sort of tight knit groups, don't always feel comfortable approaching those that are and vice versa." While Lily expressed the university made efforts to inform students of different cultures and experiences, there was an underlying unknown or unaddressed fear for students to engage with students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. While peer interaction seemed segregated, Kourtney shared segregation in the university through centers of support. She offered:

[The university] is as segregated as the city... fuck everybody is there but everybody goes to their own center. I've done some work with the centers working on different projects and even in those centers, everybody who identifies with the center title, doesn't feel a sense of belonging at that center. Everybody is there and they don't interact with each other.

The university does not offer a sense of belonging to its "diverse" student body, although BIPOC students are in the university, there is a lack of understanding, solidarity, and community across racial difference. While different student centers' intention is to support a specific identity, institutional planners voiced they did not approach student support with an intersectional lens. The segregated aspect of centers does not create belonging or create a sense of overlap within the university.

While public institutions struggle to build community by prioritizing the R1 image, being a commuter campus and a segregated space, there is a lack of belonging. However, this difficulty in embracing an inclusive and collective environment also applies to private institutions.

Private Institution

Participants at the private urban institution shared that the institution relied primarily on its religious identity for its image. Yet, despite its image, participants shared that racial profiling frequently occurred on campus. Although Angela, from her public institution, offered one observation of racial profiling, there was overwhelming instances occurring at the private institution.

There is an understanding of a religious institution being welcoming, understanding, and emphasizing social justice and care for others. However, using religion as a branding tool can be very contradictory. Teddii shared, “being a [religious] institution, [the university] is not as open as it portrays itself to be... They celebrate who they want to celebrate and they also forget who they want to forget.” Teddii described the university maintains its power by controlling and manipulating their image to personify who they see of value. As a religious university who personifies care for others and social justice they do not live up to their values, but aims for control of their branding opportunities. Additionally, William offered:

We’re a [religious] school, we’re supposed to be like the cream of the crop in terms of when it comes to the church like investigating, being critical, especially with the late leadership now at [the university], that’s been my entire life at [the university] and it’s a joke. There’s nothing about critical insights, critical engaging with race.

William shared the perceptions of the religious private institution. However, the reality does not represent its ambition. There is a lack of engagement when it comes to critical thought and inclusivity, which are attributes that the university claims to embody.

The religious private university lacks accountability to be inclusive to their BIPOC community which elevates the university's complicity with institutional violence. Racial profiling and racist incidents on campus are not only white supremacist, they are acts of violence that protects whiteness. Rose offered her observation when it comes to racial profiling. She claims:

Particularly Black men express the need to wear [university] gear because they are more frequently stopped by the [university] police. I have had some folks say that they've been asked for their ID to get into certain buildings, whereas the white people they've been with have not been asked for their ID...just walking around campus and whenever I would see a car pulled over it was always a person of color and it was by the [university] police.

The university protects whiteness by targeting and racializing Black individuals. This mistreatment and targeting does not compare to the religious identity the university claims to represent. Additionally, as a BIPOC student, Teddii experienced first-hand violence and questioned it. He shared with anger and frustration:

You have bodies on this campus that's not like yours. Those bodies should feel welcomed. They should feel protected here, they should feel safe here and we don't and that's the problem. We don't feel protected here, we don't feel safe here. You tell us that our kids will be protected, we send them to your university and they're not. Of course they're going to deal with hate crimes anywhere in life, that's totally going to happen everywhere. But they're being questioned by a campus person. Like I know I am when being asked if I go to the university and asked to show my ID, when I haven't seen you ask anybody else before. My body becomes a target. I don't know how you can compensate me not feeling like a target all of the time. When I'm doing the work that you're not doing.

Teddii's experiences demonstrates that in many instances the university protects whiteness at the expense of BIPOC students and does nothing to create a safe space for BIPOC bodies on campus. This speaks to a larger systemic issue that the university embodies that puts its BIPOC students at risk. The university struggles to use a religious identity for its initiatives; yet, it hides its violence through means of branding.

Participants shared the ways in which universities were similar and varied. While demographics of the city did not reflect the institution, public and private universities varied in how they branded themselves and student campus life. While universities branded themselves in a variety of ways, the ways in which institutional plumbers resisted white supremacy also varied.

Chapter 3: Resisting Violence

“Free speech is a threat to white supremacy”

The BIPOC community experiences white supremacist violence in the institutions they are part of. However, despite these violent encounters there are forms of solidarity building. Students, faculty, and staff have found ways to resist and disrupt whiteness in the institution. This has prompted a reactionary response from the university and creates additional barriers and has implications to institutional plumber resistance.

Reactive University

Universities in this study are reactive to students raising awareness on issues rather than proactive to create change on campus to provide an inclusive space. McKenzie shared, “My experience is that the best way when they respond it’s typically when they’ve been pushed by alumni or public, not so much students. There have been some cases where student activism has worked, but I think [the university] doesn’t have a whole lot of respect for its student activists.” The lack of respect for student voices demonstrates the inability for the university to act on its students’ needs and the desire to change only when it is suitable for the university’s image. Moreover, Susan offered that “any large institution is discouraging change. I don’t expect the university now or historically, to fully embrace student activism. I expect them to see it as a nuisance. But it’s through student activism that change happens.” The university is unwilling to accommodate student activists, yet they struggle to embrace an accountable procedure for students to voice their concerns. This demonstrates the university’s unwillingness to be receptive to student voice and their commitment to structural change. In addition to student activism, students have been navigating university resistance through more bureaucratic channels. William offered:

This university has to be very reactive to law students or other things that are being brought against them by students of color. Anything related to we're doing stuff for Native American students, or we're looking at our minor, that never happened by the way, that they're supposed to follow through with this lawsuit, is only because a student of color brought that there. They made that possible, but they had to base upon this collective experienced they've had at this university. [They were] literally being fed up, 'I shouldn't have to be this way. I shouldn't have to live this way.' The university will say well we kind of have to, by the law, follow through on this and then follow through never, there's no follow through with that.

Even when threatened with legal action, the university refuses to serve their Indigenous community by changing a racist and publicized image, creating a minor, or offering efforts to retain Indigenous students. This is a disservice to Indigenous students enrolled and to future students who will experience institutional violence because of racism and colonialism. While students raise awareness around issues, they are met with resistance, however, they demonstrate they are able to find solidarity with each other by collectively filing a lawsuit against the university.

Students

The ways in which students resisted or disrupted violence in the university showed up in several ways. Students prioritized caring for future students by passing activist knowledge, being transparent about their experience, and preventing future suffering in the university.

Students who were concerned for the next generation of students expressed how they would support new students, how they would prevent future violence, and how activism could progress. Kourtney shared, "I wouldn't recommend [the university] to anybody. If somebody is already there, I might be able to give them some information about how to navigate some of these systems, but I wouldn't be able to recommend them. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody." The experience Kourtney had as a student has made such an impact that they would not support

future students from attending the university, though would support them navigating the institution if they were already there. While Kourtney would want to prevent BIPOC experienced violence, Teddii's intention on keeping resistance going was another alternative to supporting students. He offered that he was "all about passing the torch. I feel like the same person cannot always do this work or be the face of that work. You need to be able to pass it to the next generation because they're going to be able to keep that flame going." The importance to support continued resistance was emphasized, and it demonstrates how instilling resistance in the next generation is a way to continue the work started by previous generations. This form of resistance, by "passing the torch," reflects how student resistance is a communal and collective effort.

This communal effort transpires to student activism and resistance in many forms. Although it is often met with defeat, it brings attention to the need for a range of tactics. Joan described past activist struggles at her institution. She shared:

Like generations of student-led students have done education. Both work with the university through committee work and coming up with different ideas; what [the image] could look like, to try to do it in a way that would like uplift the university, or it's been done in ways that would disrupt the university, and there's been no changes... so it's a terrible racist colonial [image] and it's a very easy thing to change. I think the refusing to change it it's a refusing to decenter, to rethink the settler colonial narrative to get right with native communities and all communities of color. I think they're using this not caring, drawing the line, seeing it as a non-issue, using Indigenous students as a way to really kind of create an institution that's unwelcoming at the core for all students of color.

This demonstrates how student activists are met with such resistance to create change in the university. While they struggle, students are met with the prospect of changing how they address the university. Lily described her experience, that she has "no problem with confrontation. I obviously do not go looking around trying to yell into people's faces and get into arguments, but I also realize the value of being in the situation or in the position where I do feel comfortable enough to use my voice when and if it is necessary." Knowing when to exert voice in the spaces

and capacities she can offer, demonstrates how there is a need to navigate the violence the system offered but also alludes to some of those spaces not being safe. Expressing how Lily used her voice, is a powerful tool and demonstrates feminist praxis as a way of coming to voice to support care for others (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011). In addition to knowing when to use voice, changing tactics or approaches to raising awareness about the institutional violence was also prevalent for institutional plumbers. William shared, “[the vice president] is an administrator of color who is not on board with any of these diversity initiatives, even though he says he is. But I will point out that our wonderful [publication], student organization, has recently called him out. So, we’ll see where that goes.” William brought attention to the lack of movement or accountability on behalf of the university administration. However, he also described the resilience through solidarity among students who resisted institutional violence as a collective student body. Additionally, McKenzie described a new demonstration policy her university introduced. She described:

The demonstration policy essentially limited demonstrations to a specific area on campus and they had to be approved by particular offices in advance... It made it very hard for students and faculty and staff to organize together... The demonstration policy also said that it would mobilize both campus and city police forces as necessary... any time threatening police action, is a threat of violence. Even if you don’t ever intend to mobilize that violence.

Institutional plumbers described the demonstration policy as a way the university protects their power by silencing students. It demonstrates how the university’s lack of motivation to be receptive to student needs creates the need for activism. William affirmed this about the university by offering that “the demonstration policy was just one example of trying to curb demonstration, free speech is a threat to white supremacy.” The demonstration policy establishes the university’s stance on upholding white supremacy at the expense of the most marginalized student voices.

As mentioned earlier, Lily described her experience in deciphering when to use her voice, but also alluded to implications about a situation being safe. Kourtney shared a similar experience to Lily when using her voice. She said, “just choose [my voice] wisely. I don’t think I cannot be vocal, right? Like no one can technically stop me from being vocal, but it’s not in my best interest if I’m still interested in graduating. Until I am no longer interested in graduating or have graduated it’s not in my best interest to be [vocal].” This highlights the awareness of the implications for being vocal and how using voice in spaces can have negative repercussions on a student’s tenure as a student. It also demonstrates how the university leadership is protective of their stance and how they rarely intend to really listen to students’ raised concerns. Another implication Angela shared was about the concern for students’ finances. She said, “I think it’s really hard when people know when they’re going into debt... How can you risk being arrested for civil disobedience if you don’t have the money, if you’re going to miss part of your job.” The relationship between violence and capitalism is evident here. Students are not able to speak out against violence and are financially impacted with potential job loss for exerting their voice. This demonstrates the lack of mobility students have when it comes to experiencing violence and its impact on how they are able to survive outside of the institution. Luckily, in some capacity, staff and faculty are able to step in and support students through navigating institutional barriers.

Faculty Resistance

To support students, faculty step in through mentoring and offer financial support to students. Additionally, faculty can use their power in the university to advocate for students. William offered to support his students and said, “I don’t want to go so far as to say the willingness to get arrested, but I’m giving students my number and if you get arrested, call me, I’ll come bail you out.” This radical effort of support is transformational to the relationship and

community shared with students. Another way faculty have been able to support students is by being faculty advisors for student organizations that experience push-back from the university. Joan described, that “[a Palestinian student organization] can hold their anti-Israel apartheid awareness week by throwing some of my university validated institutional power as a tenured faculty member behind that.” By using the power Joan holds, she is able to support and represent students in ways that stand against colonialism, imperialism and apartheid. Joan has demonstrated her power and position within the university to support students on the ground but also to navigate the institution in other realms. She said:

I see my role as a faculty member as really pressing on the upper administration to not make it about themselves and worry about [the university]’s image, but try to redress at a full human level to the communities because it’s never individual, to not let them individualize it...I think there’s so much violence in the classroom, the way students are taught, that is really something that is a faculty member, I feel for a lot. So I will report faculty to their chairs, so they have to go through processes of re-education and re-training themselves.

This demonstrates that there is an urgency to raise awareness and to resist violence in a variety of settings, by using one’s faculty power. Faculty who raise awareness, offer administrators in power an opportunity to do some re-educating, that not only disrupts the structure of the university but provides an opportunity to grow. Additionally, faculty who are able to navigate the institutional hierarchy, are able to discover who their comrades are but can also have some negative ramifications. Angela offered:

One of the positives [of activism] for me has been when you’re vocal and then you find out who is with you and who’s against you *laugh* then you know who your allies are you know who your antagonists are. Implications when I was pre-tenure, one of the implications was who am I going to piss off but who is going to be super critical of my tenure file.

Vocal faculty are able to ascertain their allies but for those who have not earned tenure, activism presents risks. William also affirmed this by sharing, “I definitely feel like if I’m vocal, I will not

get tenure.” Implications of using voice not only affects students negatively, it has the potential to negatively impact faculty with their tenure and promotion. While there are implications for being vocal in the greater university space, faculty also navigate the classroom space as a place for modeling anti-racist and solidarity work.

As a faculty member, Joan not only used her tenure status to support students, she also did work in the classroom to support students’ growth. She shared her experience navigating activism and how it pairs with teaching. She shared:

I’ve seen a place in the midst of that activism you have seen women stepping forward and men often learning to step back. I’ve really tried to contribute to that. I’ve really tried to contribute in my teaching or in how I engage student movements because they can be places where people learn how to be non-feminist cultural nationalist. There’s a lot of sense of leadership in masculinity, so those hierarchies also have to be dismantled. And men still at [the university], men of color, get so much more value and privilege than women of color. Like [the university] thinks diversity as Black man. So it devalues demands from women of color, it devalues demands of queer folks of color.

Joan who has an anti-racist awareness, challenged misogyny in how she navigated the institutional hierarchy, but also supported and empowered her students who come from places of privilege. Offering the classroom as a place of community, creates solidarity in the classroom where it centers marginalized identities (hooks, 1994), such as queer BIPOC folks. In addition to centering activism and solidarity work in the classroom, William shared an experience where he was able to model anti-racist dialogue in the classroom. William expressed with frustration:

I do a little trivia game with [students]. Half of the questions are about your common trivia questions and half of your questions are about people of color’s history in communities. By the end of it I can see one student had become visibly frustrated because they asked a question, name a leader of the civil rights movement that is not named MLK, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and a couple others. One group came up with Emmett Till. That’s a great [person], because his death spurred and ignited [the civil rights movement]. The student got up and said, ‘so you’re saying that any Black person that lived during that time period was a leader of the civil rights movement?’ You could see my three Black students in the back just look up. I had to immediately address the issue and said, ‘I find that extremely devaluing and I find that as an instructor and a professor

to be extremely ahistorical. What do you think you're saying and why are you saying that?' *laugh* He could not answer the question.

The capability to take a stand against a racist comment in class and specifically challenge the student who offered this to the class, demonstrates the willingness to create a safe space for BIPOC students. This approach creates an inclusive classroom where students have equitable access to power, agency, and voice. This challenges the assumed hierarchical violence that would otherwise impact and control the classroom culture (hooks, 1994). William responded in a way that would prioritize the safety of his BIPOC students. The opportunity to model anti-racist and solidarity efforts for students does not solely fall on faculty: staff have also taken the opportunity to support students through modelling as well.

Staff Resistance

Drawing on my two interviews, staff members' resistance to institutional violence was similar to faculty resistance through mentoring and support, but differed by circumnavigating transactional relationships in the university. Landback shared the ways in which they have supported students in their department role. They highlighted:

There's some injustices that I am more vocal about. When students have come to me before when they didn't have clarity from their instructor and their grade did not feel fair. I identified a pattern over the course of some semesters, that it was Latina women telling me this. So then I brought it up and my supervisor had a talk with that instructor because it was somebody we were hiring. I don't know what all went down, but then he ended up leaving.

Landback was able to advocate for their Latina student who was targeted by an instructor. This demonstrates how staff support their students by navigating the institutional hierarchy, but also the violence BIPOC students experience in the classroom. Landback resisted racialized institutional violence their student experienced. In addition to supporting students through their

experiences with violence, Kourtney shared her experience when working with other students in her staff role. She shared:

The student is actually all about what it looks like to increase awareness around the different identities on campus and how to be disruptive of systems that marginalize identities, whether that is disruptive to your own behavior and choices or disruptive to things that are happening in class or in an organization or in dorms.

Processing and supporting students around their awareness of marginalities and the ability to disrupt those hierarchal systems was a priority for Kourtney. She further shared, “I am helping around awareness...So giving people real tools, like these are things you say when you’re trying to interrupt something that doesn’t feel good to you or diminishes your identity, or someone else’s.” The ability to disrupt violence in settings that infringe on students’ identities, demonstrates the importance of mentorship when it comes to students advocating for themselves and calling out the interaction. This disruption challenges violence from happening again and reclaims students’ agency. In addition to mentoring and support for students, staff also navigate additional obstacles when it comes to their positions. Landback offered their experience of lending support to intended BIPOC centered events. In regards to various departments seeking Landback’s experience and emotional labor to collaborate BIPOC events, they said:

[Departments and centers will say] we need more diverse perspectives, so they bring those people in. Those people are being asked to do labor on top of their already like paid job description labor. That can feel like transactional...There’s this [white woman] who, this is their paid job description role in the university, and they’re asking other folks because they want diverse perspectives because they want their content to be meaningful and transformative and be delivered in a wholistic way. But everybody who is being asked to do that is volunteer. So they’re doing work on top of work. That can feel transactional because you’re getting paid to do this stuff...it’s definitely additional labor especially because, our lived experiences and being asked to share those, I would say I do a lot of analyzing a lot of ‘what I’m even going to say, how is it going to be perceived.’ It can feel transactional because [the white woman] then also receives the accolades.

This additional emotional labor on top of Landback's current role as a part-time employee stretches their capacity as an individual, but also negates any sort of tribute for their work. The exploitation of BIPOC employees not only demonstrates their disposability through the way the university treats their labor, but it demonstrates how white supremacy permeates throughout campus. Landback aimed to set boundaries in exploitative circumstances to preserve their emotional labor and also resists exploitation of their labor from institutional violence.

Students, faculty, and staff all experience violence in different capacities on campus, but their ability to resist demonstrates community and solidarity. This form of resistance is essential to create a feminist praxis of radical care and sets the trajectory for a just, equitable, and empathetic approach to education.

Chapter 4: Feminist Praxis

“It creates my kinship relations, it creates my family relations, it creates my sense of the world”

Throughout interviews, institutional plumbers stressed their approaches to the ethics of care and community building inside and outside the university, which I identify as feminist praxis. The meaning of building community to the participants was described as what it looks like in the classroom, its impact on participants, how their roles supported others by mentorship, pedagogical approaches, and empowerment, but also what it meant to build community by socially withdrawing from the university. Additionally, feminist care praxis was demonstrated through the radical importance of self-care in order to be one’s best self but also to find solidarity in navigating violence.

Building Community in the Institution

Participants noted several spaces where they build community, such as in the classroom and with others at the institution. Community showed up in different ways, for instance, in their pedagogical approaches, student organizations, mentorship and outside of the institution. Joan shared, that “[community building] creates my kinship relations. It creates my family relations; it creates my sense of the world.” The community that Joan found in the university really creates who is in her circle of support. However, despite the university being place of institutional violence, there are spaces where community relations can form. Rose shared that it is in and through her role within the center that she works at, that she fosters community building with graduate students. She said, “So each month we come together...and we spend time reflecting on a variety of topics they can relate to leadership development, community work, it’s a way to build community with one another...Sometimes we bring in outside speakers, this last one was on self-care.” This demonstrates the importance of connection with others—how offering a space

for folks to come together and learn about topics can help them grow individually and as a cohort. Navigating what community may look like also varies in different spaces in the institution. Angela offered how the university's childcare center fostered community for her. She shared, "the [university] childcare center is a really important source of community for a lot of people. It was for me when I had a kid there, that was where I met other junior faculty moms and graduate students. Like how do we do this thing of being a scholar and a mother?" She disclosed how this space helped her understanding as a parent and scholar and offered ways junior faculty could navigate the institutional space together as parents. Community was also described as being cultivated in the classroom.

Nurturing community in the classroom comes from the caring educators that work to demonstrate education and seeing students as a whole person. Susan shared, "my hope is even if you're just planting a seed for a student that might come to fruition like ten years later or even if you only reach half of the students like there's a ripple effect in terms of teaching." This emulates care reasoning (Jaggar, 1995), such as the ethics of care Susan displayed when she offered care and time to her students. Susan demonstrated how educators are individuals that cultivate what students are able to take away from class, not merely creating a transactional relationship to earn a degree. Susan showed by example why it was important to cultivate this knowledge and make an impact on young scholars. Similarly, Angela's pedagogical approach was informed by intersectionality. She said:

What I end up prioritizing is learning more about intersectional feminism, trying to do intersectional feminism, practicing an ethic of care. Thinking about power relations in everyday life, and balancing the analysis of power relations with an ethic of care. Listening to people I see is good feminist mentors and building those connections and to make sure to include students who are on the less powerful end of whatever spectrum in the networks they need.

By focusing her pedagogy on an ethics of care, bridging connections, and disrupting power dynamics in class, Angela's approach was inclusive to students. Feminist praxis is illuminated by disrupting hierarchy in the classroom and creating a space for collective voice to balance the classroom dynamics (hooks, 1994). This elucidates the power behind educating in a holistic way, rather than pushing individualism in a neoliberal framework. To foster community in William's class, he emphasized the need for trust. He shared, that "establishing sort of a rapport with those students. Like they can trust me, I can trust them generally. But, they know, not to say that they're getting away with things, but they know that my place, my class is safe. Not just safe, it's a place if they need to turn off...that sit back, relax, and listen a little bit." This sort of environment alleviates pressure and confirms that the classroom can be a safe communal space of learning. In addition to creating a safe space for students to learn, prioritizing BIPOC students and creating BIPOC community centered approaches of care is feminist praxis. Joan shared:

I think that for the teaching part of my role, what makes me passionate is, I think it's creating and holding space for students; Students of color, BIPOC students, first generation students, to learn their capacity to transform the places that they're in, the institutions they're in... You know that they're going to experience resistances that are not dealt with directly by the university and that are even disguised by the university...I am empowered by their learning to analyze and become stronger and empower themselves and find community.

Joan offered her awareness about the adversity marginalized students may encounter in the university, whether it be apparent or disguised in the structure. She emulated how these relationships with students can be cultivated to build community and be situated in empowerment. The mutual sharing of knowledges and growth is feminist praxis grounded in collective empathy (hooks, 1994). Joan further described how she challenged individualism through her teaching. Further, she drew on lived experiences as a form of education. She explained:

By taking that idea that the way that you understand where the dividing line is drawn, between the valued and devalued is through becoming a reader of one's own experience. Especially because language is of liberalism and the general language of the classroom disguises that experience behind ideas of individual responsibility. By teaching students to read their own experience or their informal knowledge to experiential analysis, so students of color, women students of color especially, to take that as the basis of their analysis to read them as a text within the classroom.

Joan highlighted the way she empowers students through education in the classroom by “being a reader of one's own experience.” This is feminist pedagogy. Feminist scholars and educators know that “reclaiming one's own education and sharing knowledge with others can be an important and empowering educational experience” (Ochoa & Pershing, 2011, pp. 23-24). Rather than center neoliberal individualist learning, Joan valued the experiences students offer to the classroom community and understood them as a way of sharing knowledges. Susan affirmed this by stating, “emotions are a part of learning.” Feminist praxis within the institution captures the relationship between students and teachers as a way to model collective learning, and highlights the idea “that everyone contributes” (hooks, 1994, p. 8). This idea of collective learning is the opposite to neoliberal notions of individualism and individual responsibility for learning (Perez & Salter, 2019). In addition to the relationship with learning, implementing an ethics of care in the approach to education was also important to faculty. William shared a variety of feminist praxis to education, he said:

I do not require attendance in my class, especially when it comes to considering the mental health of my students. I am very honest with them and I'm very open with my own mental health; more so in graduate classes than I am in undergraduate classes. But I do, drop the hints, drop the signals, if you have a problem, you don't need to tell me what it is, but take a break...For your own well-being, take care of yourself first. Like you come first, the education comes later.

In addition to being transparent about flexibility with regards to mental health, William also has longer office hours. He shared:

I have very long office hours, I have six to eight office hours a week. I don't presume anything about what my students are missing, or when they're gone or what they're trying to say to me or what they don't listen to. I always put my power points ahead of time on [the course site], so they can follow in class. I allow computers against the judgement of my department.

William's flexible and humanist approach to education is feminist praxis as he saw and cared for the students in his class. His caring nature affirmed what it means to be a feminist pedagogue (hooks, 1994) and aims to disrupt the neoliberal educational practice which prioritizes output (Mountz et al., 2015) over people. Angela also mentioned how she centered a feminist approach to education. She stated, "I try to do things to call on female students who write really well but then don't speak up where I try to do things or I say, let's write a note card and I look at people's answers and then I call on people based on that. This is really good can I call on you...I'm trying to ask permission first." Angela voiced how she incorporated consent in course discussions. By doing so, she created a safe classroom space for students to learn and build community. Having a communal understanding of consent by an instructor modeling it, allows for power dynamics to shift and to apply this approach outside the classroom in other settings (hooks, 1994).

In addition to feminist pedagogies, the ways in which institutional plumbers created community were through empowerment and mentorship. Teddii offered his experience with two of his mentors, one as a mentor of color and one as a white mentor who advocates for him in his department. On the relationship with his mentor of color he shared:

He's everything that the university is not...he's there and I don't mean just academically, in all aspects of my life. If I need him he's there. It's not like he has to hold my hand throughout this process, but he always have been there. He lets me know that I can contact him if I'm concerned about something. I can let him know freely and in confidence and that's what I look for in a person.

Teddii stressed the importance of having a mentor that he can empathize with and rely on with confidence. On Teddii's relationship with his white mentor, he shared that:

He really makes you feel safe, he makes you feel protected. Even when you don't really sense it yourself, he has a way of welcoming you in. But doing it in a way that doesn't make you feel like there's something to gain. He genuinely cares. He's all about listening to the students and also being effective and when I mean effective he's looking for implementation, like what ways can we stop this from happening again? Like how do we go about this? He does this in protecting his students and not necessarily caring about the university.

The relationship Teddii had with his white mentor described the importance of advocating for students and how to prevent racial violence incidents from reoccurring in the classroom. Teddii was able to receive support and assurance through his mentors and this was essential to his success in the institution. Landback shared their experience of supporting students as a racially ambiguous, mixed and of Indigenous Maaya and European descent. They said:

Just being here, being who I am. I feel like often I'm the odd one out, I'm weird whatever. But I think it's important to have people like that in the university and not just these other people who are so comfortable, maybe because of their ignorance to uphold oppressive systems. So somebody who's out here challenging [oppressive systems].

The representation Landback offered their students demonstrates the collective identity of experiencing institutional violence, and allows for the transparency to be vulnerable in toxic spaces. The experience of vulnerability and resistance impacted how Landback offered support to students. They shared:

Working with students one on one and specifically like students of color, BIPOC students to be able to receive them as somebody who works at this university and be able to support them and do everything I can to make things easier and not more difficult...presenting options, instead of keeping them like secret or like holding onto them like its gate keeping. Which I feel like is easy to encounter in the university. People just want to uphold stupid rules because what? What uphold like white supremacy? *laugh* Let's not...The opportunities to you know organize events, bring folks that I have relationships with to come through and share their knowledge also, the possibility to do like funnel monies to people and community.

The ways in which Landback offered their labor to connect community to the university space is a form of feminist praxis where they are able to navigate the bureaucratic institutional structure, but also be present to support BIPOC students and community educators to share their knowledges. Not only does this invest valuable emotional labor into the institution, it resists the violence the university perpetuates. In addition to BIPOC representation in mentorship and support, peer mentoring was also prevalent for participants in this study. Kourtney shared her understanding of mentoring students as offering space for them to process. She said, “sometimes just talking through it, sometimes it is just making space for people who feel alone while they are doing some writing or thinking through some things or reading something for someone, just like validating like this is good, this is something that can turn into something that you’ll be proud of, so keep pushing.” Kourtney validated the experiences and owned voice which demonstrated how it is essential to have a sounding board and affirmation for student development. This peer student to student relationship that Kourtney shared with her students can also be viewed as undergraduate students supporting other undergraduate students. Lily described supporting and advocating for others. She said, to “extend the offer to others who maybe don’t feel quite as able or empowered to use their voice. To help themselves and advocate for themselves in [threatening] situations to fill that gap for them.” Lily described how she exerted feminist praxis: caring for others’ well-being and offering to advocate for others. Rose also shared her experience in supporting graduate students she works with. She spoke about how she offered support for graduate students. She said, “I don’t want just to recruit people of color without having a support system and resources in place to honor and support folks while they’re navigating the education system. So that means I’m recruiting but also adjusting programing, identifying mentors, affinity groups, that sort of thing.” Rose cared for students’ specific needs, navigates racial violence with

affinity groups and aims to be “transparent in how we talk about power, privilege and oppression.” This demonstrates clear transparency from staff to student—there is a commitment to humanistic forms of improvement. This form of mentorship and empowerment is grounded in an ethics of care (Bozalek et al., 2014). For example, Joan went out of her way to support a student’s emotional health. She shared:

The idea that a faculty member said, ‘you know, you should light a candle and look at it and cry and breathe for a while.’ I think that really was the right to self-care and it is really important. When you understand that power works on the level of interior destruction, that telling you you’re worthless, telling you that you don’t belong at this institution, that you’re always a suspect and your entrance is always suspect; it induces you to feel like you’re fake or that sort of thing. That kind of radical embrace of the self, being encouraged to do that for ourselves and for each other I think is really important. It’s a power that works on that level than internal self-destruction.

This bridge between care in the classroom and care for the person outside of the classroom is feminist care praxis. Joan approached this in a humanistic way by embracing the student as a whole person. In addition to caring for students in the classroom, Joan went beyond being a teacher; she was a teacher that demonstrated cared for the whole human.

Institutional plumbers demonstrate there are opportunities to build community in the classroom, through mentors, and empowering each other within the institution. Additionally, building community outside the institution is another way to receive and offer support. Joan attempted to expand community building beyond campus. She shared:

[Being a faculty advisor for student organizations] is a big role, it’s a big beautiful hard role that involves intergenerational community, it involves building community that goes outside the classroom. It involves opening up one’s home, it involves embracing the person as a full human being, who comes from somewhere...it involves going where you’re asked to go, right? Not just doing it as a university person, but doing it as an important part of your life and also in the city.

Joan embodied feminist praxis by building relationships and communities within and outside the university and how she embraced the student as a “full human being.”

Space Outside of the Institution

Participants shared how they were able to protect their emotional well-being outside of the institution through establishing community connections and avoiding the university. Joan offered the ways in which she established relationships outside the university. She shared:

I feel like there's this mutual support thing. You get friendships and relations of care that continue...we gain energy and support, our collectivities grow. That's a good way to do it. I think sometimes you have to detach from the institution, not battling every day, because you could. Making sure that the politics of the campus or do not overwhelm you.

Joan described a form of feminist praxis by highlighting the importance of making connections outside of institutions and of nurturing self-care within relations. Emotionally withdrawing from the university to prevent emotional burn out or from being overwhelmed provides an intention of care for self and for others (Ahmed, 2014). Caring for the self and others is feminist praxis by establishing “caring communities” (Ahmed, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1239). This demonstrates finding community, despite institutional violence, is feminist and elucidates the strength one gains from feminist care praxis. Joan further described her experience of standing up against institutional violence as, “like a love, care, understanding, connecting to others who've experienced [racial violence]. Like rage and collectivity is the only way to stand against that.” Collectively resisting institutional violence is a way to find solidarity outside of the institution. Landback stressed the importance of not having their life and identity being exclusively defined by work and the institution. They shared:

I've just seen some people here like, their whole world is here. My whole world is not here. But I'm grateful to meet people here and I'm also super grateful to be connected to all of the other people that I'm connected for other work and community work. That

helps to keep me sane. To not be fully swallowed by the institution or the demands of this place.

Landback shared how they were able to set boundaries with work, while still building connections with the community, was a way in which they were able to care for their well-being.

Avoiding the university entirely was another way of cultivating community space for institutional plumbers. Joan described, “It might be about not trying to take the space anymore and not hold space there. Sometimes leaving misrecognition, not wanting to be in the space, is also a powerful thing.” By not being in the space BIPOC folks can prevent the propaganda the university dispels through tokenization. Kourtney used her silence as a way to challenge the space, and physically not being present as a way to resist violence. Resisting violence, as described in Chapter 3, is feminist praxis, and by avoiding the space demonstrates the need to create alternative spaces. McKenzie also shared the impact of the neoliberal university on her and how she navigates space outside the university. She said, “so much of the culture of academia can itself be very competitive and very rooted in that burn out culture then every conversation sort of came back to the stressors. So sort of deliberately making decisions to form relationships outside of the academy was helpful.” To prevent burn out culture and the reproduction of university culture by being present, having intention to build relationships outside of the institution can help with mental health and centers care for the self. Finally, Joan described possibly leaving the university as a whole to be able to find what is needed to sustain. She offered that “trying to find this university within the university, some people call it the under commons, where you find what you need. Or you find what you can use and you steal it and run. Or you find your people and you get it and you move on.” At times the university can be so violent that it pushes its community out, largely BIPOC students as retention is a significant

issue which will be discussed in **Chapter 5**. Institutional plumbers' account and counterstories highlight that the university space is not as inclusive as it portrays itself to be.

Self-Care as Feminist Praxis

Self-care can be seen as feminist praxis as it focuses on having needs met in order to sustain and be able to support others. Participants reflected on how self-care is necessary and radical in the classroom. Prioritizing self-care in the university supported institutional plumbers' well-being on campus and were able to function at their best capacity in their role in the university. Joan offered that, "I don't think the need for self-care is greatly understood. I think it gets transformed into a language of counseling, a language of therapy, a language of you're responsible for your own mental health." This reiterates that the impacts on one's mental health is the responsibility of those affected, however this does not consider how therapy can also be damaging to BIPOC, queer, and other marginalized identities. Prioritizing self-care broadly and not merely through the language of therapy is essential when discussing self-care practices. Landback also emphasized what it means to care for others. They shared, "prioritizing care for others, would be being like a human, who is caring and receives students as other human beings who are complex people who have their whole lives and like are not here to just pay money and get a piece of paper." Resisting the neoliberal transactional nature of education, Landback approached care by seeing people as they are and offered them space to be complex and themselves. In addition to prioritizing care for others, this can be modeled in the classroom, too. McKenzie offered her experience as a PhD student who also teaches. She said, "if you don't provide students space for self-care, if you don't provide a classroom that can respect for self-care, those students will not succeed, they're going to drop out." In order to preserve a care-filled environment, self-care needs a space in the classroom in order for students to become successful,

but also to retain them. Another way to center care in the classroom is by being transparent about mental health. Joan offered, “politicizing my exhaustion, the students’ exhaustion, politicizing self-care as a radical act, the Audre Lorde saying. It’s just really true. Whether privately or but also in the classroom we talk about that.” Being transparent about mental health concerns to her students, it de-stigmatizes conversations around mental health, but also builds community in the willingness to be vulnerable. Teddii shared his experience with a colleague in his department. He said:

We made a deal that no matter what we are going to say what we feel in a sense of it’s not being an oppression competition. It’s not I’m going through more crap than you are, you’re going through more crap than I am. It’s a matter of I’m here to listen and get what you need to get off your chest and just say it and be okay with just saying it.

Teddii who was able to build community through mutual experience of violence within the institution, demonstrates the need for comradery and fostered connections to prevent isolated suffering. Susan shared a similar interaction with her colleagues:

I really have a wonderful sisterhood of women colleagues and we do what we call ‘productive bitching,’ where we vent about sort of the racialized and patriarchal structure of the university, but also nurture each other through it and also like not just our feelings, but talking about ways in which we can advocate for changes to that structure. I think that’s both self-care and care for others.

Again, to stress a mutual support of suffering and navigating violence within the institution shows the ability to turn the exhaustion experienced into something that can support sustaining one another through a feminist care praxis. Mountz and colleagues share the need to slow down the demands of the university through feminist resistance that is situated in care and community (Mountz et al., 2015). They share, “by slowing down—to listen and read what others have to say, to expand our experiences by getting out of offices and classrooms—we can do our best scholarship, teaching, and mentoring” (Mountz et al., 2015). In addition to caring for oneself

through feminist resistance in the institution, it can also contribute to how institutional plumbers are able to be present to do their jobs. Landback shared:

Care for self means that I'm more likely to show up in a good way for collaborations...because I really like working with people across campus...I'm very much relationship based and prioritizing care for others in my role, hopefully would mean that people feel seen and humanized, they feel valued, they feel comfortable to talk with me as their advisor or as a staff member on campus as somebody in the administration, so like contributing to a sense of belonging.

Landback's ability to recognize what they need in order to do their job in a way that is effective is by caring for themselves. Building relationships is emotional work and by focusing on themselves, Landback was able to support students and colleagues in roles that are collaborative and valuing.

Creating community and centering care in navigating institutional violence, whether inside or outside the institution, is a form of feminist praxis. By building community, feminist praxis embraces what it is to be a collective and to stand against violence. The ways in which to foster a feminist, care centered, humanistic, and anti-racist university, was also expressed by participants in this study to offer thoughts on what the university can do to create an inclusive and equitable space.

Chapter 5: The Alternative

“Injustice in the university looks like the university existing”

Previous chapters have shown the various ways white supremacy is apparent within the university as an institution. However, there is beauty in the ways that communities have resisted that violence, been able to build community, and grown despite the implications that come with receiving a degree in a white supremacist institution. As a means to resist discourses and structures of white supremacist culture, counterstories offer an opportunity to elevate voices and narratives of those who approach education through an anti-racist framework (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). The purpose of this thesis chapter is to offer space to those who offered suggestions to counter violence within the institution. Institutional plumbers shared suggestions on what the university could do to improve or to create a space for liberatory education and praxis. To preface these findings, Joan shared how two central approaches could progress. She explained, “I always say there’s two ways to go. In one way is to work within committees in the university structure... and the other ways is to work to build power to force the university to change in a more kind of creative tension way. To support student activism that may or may not be considered civil by the university.” Joan shared how institutional plumbers see the university changing through bureaucratic and radical efforts.

Suggestions

Institutional plumbers shared some ideas on what the university could do to improve the climate of the institution. Some of the more bureaucratic suggestions were centering BIPOC retention of students and faculty, mandating anti-racist training, demanding transparency and accountability of the university and its aims, and teaching the history of the university space.

These suggestions demonstrate there can be effort made by the university to create a higher education space that is accountable to the committed initiatives they claim.

Several participants mentioned the need to center BIPOC retention, either faculty or students. Kourtney shared:

I would feel like the university should understand there's a whole bunch of programs but none of them go deep enough to make a large enough impact where people want to retain or have a sense of belonging. So, I think there are some things that need to go deeper...I feel like there's a missed opportunity for a whole bunch of things to happen that could connect people in a way that would make it, could make it, what I would think is an elite institution. Elite being my own word.

There is a need for the university to have programs that accommodate the level need of BIPOC students so they can be successful in the university. Kourtney identified what an elite university would look like, such as a mutual feeling of a sense of belonging and the university being accountable to their aims and values. Landback was more critical of the volume of concern the university had towards retention of its BIPOC community. They questioned:

Do you care that the retention of BIPOC faculty is low or sucks? Or do you care that the graduation rate of BIPOC students is a huge gap from white students? When it's convenient or when it really affects you of course then you're going to do something. That's how the system continues to and is upheld, right?

Participants expressed there was a distinct lack of concern for BIPOC student retention from the university. While numbers are separated, the impact from retention of BIPOC faculty and students demonstrate a connection. William affirmed this when voicing the possibility of leaving because of the lack of concern to retain BIPOC faculty. He said, "In the past year, I have seriously debated leaving. This happens for faculty of color all of the time, but I am not a faculty of color. I am a tenured track white professor who looks like my students...When I say I'm burnt out, I honestly want to leave this university, I mean it." William's sentiment demonstrates how the university pushes those out who do the ground work to support the most marginalized

students and create a space that is anti-racist. While this demonstrates the violence witnessed by white faculty, it does not even touch the surface of the magnitude of violence experienced by its BIPOC community.

There was a need expressed by participants for anti-racist training and to be receptive to violence experienced by the university BIPOC community. While there may be an intention to create anti-racist trainings, the trainings should be conducted by BIPOC individuals who have been doing the work for years. Landback offered the need to build community in these approaches: “being critically conscious together. I think that builds community and supports like our ability to survive in this place as BIPOC faculty and staff.” The university should be a safe space for its BIPOC community, however, that is not the case when it is structured in whiteness. In addition to continuing conversations on how to frame solutions, Teddii shared his thoughts on a solution to create this movement. He said, “the administration is trying to come up with the solution, when the students are doing the work. Bring the people who are doing the work to help you come up with the solution because they’re basically telling you what they need or what they want. It’s up to you to either accept or deny.” To create a campus that centers and honors the experiences of BIPOC students, students should be consulted in their vision for future students. When students are leading the groundwork, the university should feel a sense of responsibility to act. Landback affirmed this responsibility when considering the university structure. They shared, “all white people are racist, so the best type of white person is an anti-racist, racist. So then these institutions, which are white supremacist, then we need anti-racist institutions at least.” While universities may be white supremacist institutions, there is a responsibility on the white administration to be anti-racist. In a bureaucratic way, this may come through unlearning or re-educating the white university community. Joan offered how she has supported this effort by

sharing, “you know I’ve tried to do a pilot anti-racist and decolonial justice training for all the resident assistants coming in, and the university never took that up.” To prevent the ongoing racist violence that comes from students and their resident assistants for dormitories, Joan has offered the university this approach and to do anti-racist commitment work. However, the university was unwilling to change the structure. This demonstrates the unwillingness to address or even acknowledge racial violence within the structure of the university and its community. While there are clear needs and efforts to demand structural change through anti-racist work, Landback offered another solution to anti-racist work. They shared:

We should definitely make sure that when we are doing the consultations on [trainings] that it’s like people like [a Black community based organization]. That it is BIPOC folks instead of like giving white consultant groups hundreds of thousands of dollars to supposedly give us a list of recommendations for how to diversify some aspect of campus.

Again, affirming Teddii’s sentiment about embracing the work students have been doing, there is a need to invest in BIPOC organizations to support the growth and education of the administration. By educating administrators who will gain a framework of anti-racism, it can be a step towards addressing structural violence that contributes to the lack of belonging BIPOC students experience. In order to pursue this effort there needs to be transparency and accountability with respect to the university’s commitment to change.

To be transparent with its initiatives to center students, faculty, and staff of racial difference, the university needs to be accountable to its aims to combat white supremacy. Lily described what the university can do to be transparent and accountable. She shared:

I believe the path towards improvement is truly taking an introspective look at what we believe and what we stand for as university. If our actions are not reflecting our words and the statements that we make, then we can do one of two things. We can change and review what we are saying to match what we are willing to do and what we already do.

Or we can adhere very strictly to what we say and in turn let our actions and behavior reflect that.

It is essential to have a feminist praxis of accountability, by addressing white supremacy in the university structure and the ways in which the university is actively working towards being anti-racist (Russo, 2019). This could be through structural changes to prioritize BIPOC experiences, involvement with initiatives, and transparency about the university's history of BIPOC labor exploitation. To elucidate transparency, McKenzie shared the need to have, "More active communication with the student body and with faculty and staff. Just a clear description of how things are being done and how things have been done." This transparency demonstrates a history of work and how the university has or has not made strides towards taking an anti-racist approach to education and initiatives. Rose affirmed this by sharing an aspect of her own identity. She said, "a white person needing to do my work, to do the work of understanding and seeing beyond my own identity." Anti-racist work needs to go beyond the individual and situated within the structural and institutional practices and workings. Susan described her experience of the university taking accountability by naming what the university is committed to, rather than having a cover-all diversity statement. She explained, "I think you need some sort of teeth behind things. I think you need to say like we're committed to anti-racism; we're committed to anti-sexism; we're committed to being a sanctuary campus for undocumented students; we're committed to gender identity inclusion." This demonstrates the clear commitment and opens the door for accountability to address each identity-based issue. In addition to naming, the university should not approach its anti-racist work in being performative or propagating diversity, it is the very investment in specific issues that is most pressing. Landback described:

For me it's not just performing things, it's integrating them into my personal life and then they begin to be visible into the other ways that I present in the community... If we're just telling them that [land acknowledgements] matter and [the president] doesn't really

understand why it matters, then shit doesn't mean anything. To have him read it, then it doesn't mean anything.

It is more than performing and sharing what a land acknowledgement is and actually understanding its purpose. This can be elucidated through its commitment to serving BIPOC students but not having the numbers to back up with retention, job placement, among other things. There is a lack of accountability to the university BIPOC community, and there is no transparency offered. Finally, Angela described how the university can be accountable to their histories. She said;

For the university to be accountable, there would have to be a lot of knowledge production around is this university formed, who benefited in the early days, whose labor was not sufficiently acknowledged, and it's also going on now. The fact that the unions have been done; we would have to have the right to unionize back. Because workers themselves can fight for their labor to be valued.

This demonstrates the need to know and recognize the history in and through university initiatives. The ongoing abusive nature of the university can be attributed to its lack of accountability and unwillingness to change. However, recognizing and being educated in the institution's history can be a step towards change.

Participants expressed that there was a lack of dialogue and teaching about the history of their university. Both Landback and Joan had similar frustrations and desires for the university to acknowledge and present the histories of student led activism at their university. Landback offered:

We know how usually [university activism] stories are told and documented and who does [activism]. In some ways it's sad to see...what folks' decades before us fought for and how they look now. I think that it's also part of the cycle or institutionalization happens. Like you demand this, but then it becomes institutionalized and it looks way different. It begins to become a part of the system, so then it becomes to perpetuate the same bullshit until another wave of activism happens to radicalize it, and again, remind it of its roots and why it exists. Without the people, speaking their needs, these systems are going to do this.

This demonstrates that even when histories of organizing are shared, they are often perpetuated to fit a lens that conforms to what will work in the eyes of the institution. The institutionalization of aims put forth by the university demonstrate that working in the system has its short comings when the structure itself needs to be worked on. Joan also shared the need for teaching the history. She elaborated:

I think it's also about teaching the history of university spaces, of colonization, spaces of elite consolidations of attitudes and knowledges that let them remain elites and let them continue exploitation. I think it's very sad because we have this ideology of the university as like open inquiry, meritocracy, the truth will set you free; A lot of the time you have to spend this especially dealing with white students. You have to show them education has happened again, and again, and again, they themselves have been educated and they're not doing anything.

Joan expressed that there is a direct need to teach the history, because the repetition of history perpetuates the violence that has been persistent in the university. Without the momentum to create space for histories to be shared, the white supremacist institution will continue to perpetuate the harm it creates.

The structural changes suggested by the participants, demonstrates how there is an urgency, to create change in the institution. There are urgent needs for the university to address retention and offer inclusive spaces, all which demand university accountability. In addition to suggestions of structural changes to alter the university climate, there were alternative thoughts shared that challenge the structure of colonial education to center liberation.

The Alternative

While the university has stood for prestigious education, not all education comes from the university. Participants in this study offered that there were other ways in which to function outside of the system of education and to center the lives and experiential knowledges folks can offer. Landback shared:

While the system is existing means that you are participating in [white supremacy]. You can really do your best to challenge all of these things, but until [the university] is abolished, we are participating in anti-Blackness as non-Black people and white people are participating in white supremacy as non-BIPOC people.

Landback offered incredible insight into the structure of the institution. They voiced how the educational system is situated in white supremacy and anti-Blackness, and as a consequence upholds white supremacy. Collectively, institutional plumbers expressed that their universities all participate in white supremacy, whether it was directly in policy or in its structure of administration. Angela mentioned there is a lack of transparency of the university's history built on BIPOC labor (**See Chapter 4**) and Teddii offered how a distinguished image across his campus erases the Indigenous land and identity the university hides in order to exert their power (**See Chapter 1**). The structure of the university is under the veil of liberation and growth. William shared, "I got into higher education because I genuinely believe that education is the great liberation. Once you learn something, you can't unlearn something. As you start to grow more conscious in the things around you, and conscious and also critical of the things around you, you can't go back from that." While education can be the great liberation, it may not always come from the university. The need to be critical and the opportunity for growth is important, however, that may not come from an institution rooted in violence. Landback affirmed this by sharing, "injustice in the university looks like the university existing. As a predominately white institution, settled on Indigenous homelands, that's injustice." The lack of accountability the university has for its histories and the BIPOC labor it capitalizes and exploits, demonstrates that the university can be a symbol for injustice and provide a space for whiteness or white supremacy to foster. Joan challenged this image of the university to offer a way to de-idealize university exceptionalism. She explained:

Really de-idealizing the university and re-encrypting it as a place where all of its great ideas of freedom, liberalism, and justice and morality have been used in service of gender oppression, racial stratification, and oppression and dispossession of Indigenous communities and it's always, always been that way. You have to let people see the university as two things always at once. One is that institution within the set of sedimented hierarchies and their afterlives and new lives; and the other is a place where people who aren't usually together come and meet each other.

The university could be a place where growth, community, and collectivity are embodied across difference or it can continue to uphold the sedimented hierarchies it has been preserving since its inception. To conclude, Landback offered their thought with anger:

That's really frustrating to have to always be like wait, system! Please? The system is always going to be flawed. It's never going to be looking out for all of us, it's never going to be looking out for the most marginalized folks. I'm not really one of those people who is advocating for spending all of our lives and energy challenging the system, I'm more so somebody is like that system it has to die. And we need to build our own, we need to do our own communities on our own terms over here.

Rather than conforming to the white ideal of the university or challenging the system to get transparency or accountability, institutional plumbers offered an alternative insight, to build an educational movement centering a communal and collective space. This approach would eliminate the purpose and current functions of the university. Earlier, Joan described, "It might be about not trying to take the space anymore and not hold space there. Sometimes leaving misrecognition, not wanting to be in the space, is also a powerful thing." Avoiding the space entirely is a way to actively challenge the university. The institutional plumbers' counterstories suggest there is a growing urgency to divest from the university and challenge the colonial and neoliberal forms of educating to center a community and collective form of liberatory educating.

Conclusion and Implications

The intention of this study was to determine how feminist praxis combats white supremacy in PWIs, but also understand if there were any differences in approach between universities. The initial questions asked were: (1) What is the relationship between universities and white supremacy?; (2) How do institutional plumbers resist university violence?; (3) What feminist approaches are used to combat white supremacy?; (4) How do feminist approaches vary between institutional plumbers—faculty, staff and students—in the university?; and (5) How do public and private university initiatives vary in their support to BIPOC students? By drawing on interviews with institutional plumbers, this study aimed to demonstrate the overwhelming impact white supremacy has on education and the people within educational institutions, and the profound ways in which institutional plumbers resist and work against institutional structures and policies.

Similar to previous research, the study demonstrates the presence of white supremacy and the violence experienced by BIPOC individuals within the university (Beasley et al., 2016; Bourke, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Guiffida & Douthit, 2010). My study also points to the connection between branding and diversity initiatives as a way to protect whiteness and capitalism (Ahmed, 2012). The interviews, or counterstories, by institutional plumbers also shed important light on the erasure of BIPOC identities and labor and the censorship of various forms of activism on campus. Further, the experiences of the institutional plumbers reflect the failure of universities which fail at creating and committing to inclusivity. Ahmed notes by stating, “A symbolic commitment does not necessarily represent an institutional commitment and can even be given ‘given’ its ‘absence’” (2012, p. 130). The lack of demonstrated action on behalf of the university to support students neglects the commitment

to take an anti-racist stance. This demonstrates the university's complicity with white supremacy and the perpetuation of white supremacist ideals in education. Russo elucidates the necessity of a praxis of intersectionality to address accountability in systems. She shared, "a praxis of intersectionality builds a path toward accountability in that it requires that we name and take responsibility for the power lines that connect us to one another through hierarchical structures and the logics, discourses, and actions that maintain them" (Russo, 2019, p. 7). The need for accountability was voiced by most participants, whether it be the commitment to act on diversity aims for BIPOC needs or to create equitable opportunities for success.

The ways in which institutional plumbers resisted violence within the institution centered on collectivity and solidarity in education and with each other. Students addressed being vocal, encouraging activism within the next generation of students, working within and outside of the university, and navigating forms of activism that fit the situation. Faculty advocated for students within the institutional hierarchy, using their power with tenure to support students, adjusting pedagogical approaches to fit a feminist informed lens, standing against racist violence in discourse in the classroom and embracing ways to encourage care for students. Staff resisted violence in the institution through mentorship, by encouraging students to disrupt dialogue that violated identities, and by protecting their energy. Institutional plumbers resisted the university through feminist praxis. Their approach to feminist praxis, situated in an ethics of care, was demonstrated by embracing community and solidarity within the struggle of anti-racist work within the institution. An ethics of care, which centers care as action based for others, was demonstrated in several ways. Institutional plumbers described establishing community in the classroom, caring for the self by practicing distancing from the university, and community building outside of the university as important strategies. An ethics of care was established by

prioritizing care for the BIPOC community within the institution through empowerment with others. Feminist praxis in the university was establishing space with others by sharing collective knowledges and encouraging mutual growth. Institutional plumbers were accountable to feminist praxis by caring for others, nurturing faculty and staff mentorship to students, and finding a collective space for growth.

While there were not clear distinctions between the two public and private institutions in their ability to support the university community or to disrupt violence, there were clear distinctions in the university structure and aims. For example, institutional plumbers described how the public university was comprised of mostly commuter students and that social spaces were racially segregated. Social spaces were described as peer groups and Centers that did not offer an intersectional approach to student support or research. Both universities used an element of their institutional identity as a branding opportunity. The private university used its identity as a religious university as a branding tool whereas the public university branded its identity as a R1 university. The institutional plumbers did not offer a close affinity with either of those branding identities. Finally, institutional plumbers shared that the private university participated heavily in racially profiling its BIPOC community. This is a clear example of the ways in which the university prioritizes whiteness or white supremacy in the institution. The disregard for BIPOC experiences creates a culture in which white supremacy prevents any sort of empathetic institutional response to racial violence, trauma and oppression (Russo, 2019). Russo shared, that white supremacist “institutions offer disciplinary logics along with social and economic benefits for diminishing our sense of responsibility for the harms of systemic oppression particularly when we are not the ones directly targeted” (2019, pp. 60-61). Because of the ways in which social conditioning around white supremacist violence has occurred, institutions demonstrate the

lack of response in order to uphold the benefits whiteness produces. Furthermore, these distinctions describe the ways in which the universities do not use an anti-racist model of instituting knowledge.

This study centered the practice of feminist knowledge production; therefore, it voiced the recommendations noted by institutional plumbers. Institutional plumbers offered suggestions that ranged from improving the institution and completely divesting from the institution. Recommendations on improving the institution centered the experience and prioritization of BIPOC student and faculty retention, anti-racist training for administration, and transparency and accountability to the history and the university's diversity aims. This radical call for accountability offered the opportunity to foster liberation. Russo affirms this by stating, "if we connect outsiderhood to a commitment to resistance and solidarity as well as accountability, then the possibilities expand to build alliances for collective liberation" (2019, p. 49). When there is a collective solidarity, the possibility to dismantle violent systems seems possible through liberation. The way in which participants offered their recommendations supported a feminist informed, liberatory framework that called for accountability and the ethics of care. While institutional plumbers did not make a suggestion of communal healing, their suggestions offered insights into what liberation and growth may look like. Russo describes restorative justice as a way healing and growth can happen. She shared, "community support circles create spaces for people to collectively support those impacted by violence, to become accountable for building and maintaining support, as well as to celebrate people's resilience and resistance" (2019, p. 120). The university needs to be accountable to its violent policies and embedded structural whiteness and histories, while simultaneously work to be accountable to the future the university desires. Accountability is not a one-time action but a continual process (Russo, 2019).

Institutional plumbers who have experienced this violence as well as those who have studied structural violence, address the urgency for collective liberation by working on the institutional structure and by divesting. Those who offered the suggestion to divest from the institution, emphasized the need for education to become centered in community. Institutional plumbers described that education in the university is structured in white supremacy. The awareness of violence is essential to challenge the violent structures of the university. This is affirmed by hooks when she shared, “to build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (2003, p. 36). By divesting from the university and creating a collective approach to educating, institutional plumbers envision communal ways to challenge white supremacy within and outside the university.

This study brings to light the ways in which white supremacy impacts the university, but also the beauty in which activism, solidarity and resistance can be a way to find community and embrace collective knowledge sharing. Feminist praxis was used by institutional plumbers to challenge white supremacy protected and fostered by the university . This study also points to how universities are rather similar in the ways in which they protect and preserve white supremacy. In addition, it discusses the similar approaches institutional plumbers use to disrupt violence. Russo shares, “naming [white supremacy], then, is uncomfortable, causes distress, and yet may be what will cultivate more accountability” (2019, p. 51). Change starts when white institutions practice continual accountability to transform from a violent institution to a liberating institution. The institutional plumbers in this study offered an alternative approach to education that foster liberation and mutual knowledge sharing.

Limitations and Further Research

There were a few limitations to this study in regards to the interviews. The first limitation was the influence of my own identities in conducting and analyzing the interviews. As a white identified individual who conducted this study, my whiteness influences how I created the interview questions, performed as an interviewer, and analyzed the results. Although my passion and commitment to anti-racist research comes with good intention, the potential adverse impact of my whiteness in this study could not be avoided. Therefore, the results of this study are influenced by whiteness and this limitation is presented with transparency of inherent racial violence I may have caused to participants and scholarship.

Another limitation to this study was the demographics of the faculty I interviewed. During the first round of participant outreach, I had made contact with a BIPOC identified faculty member who was interested in interviewing. However, there was a lack of availability on behalf of the faculty member. This is important to note because often BIPOC faculty have additional obligations (Hua, 2018), exert more emotional labor (Hua, 2018), and are asked to serve on diversity committees (Ahmed, 2012) within the university. Although my research does not highlight a BIPOC faculty member's voice, it brings attention to the additional labor and exploitation of BIPOC faculty experiences. This is a limitation to my study because I was unable to highlight the experience of a BIPOC faculty member and only address the barriers and experiences of white faculty. This impacts the results of my study because in both staff and student roles BIPOC experiences were shared and elevated.

It is my hope that this study can inspire future work on the history of activism and policy change within universities on a larger national scale. When I asked participants about past student activism at their university, respondents did not have much insight to offer. This informs

me that there is a lack of accessibility to past student led action and a way that universities prevent future student led resistance. It is important to further explore and analyze the different approaches institutional plumbers use when disrupting white supremacy in universities, reflecting how various geographies and histories influence activism and feminist praxis.

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Appendix A:

Interview Positionality Statement

Thank you so much for consenting to my research study “Feminist praxis used to combat white supremacy in predominately white institutions: A comparative analysis between public and private universities.” As a feminist scholar, it is important to my approach to research to be transparent with you about my identities as a researcher as it pertains to this study. I am a white first generation college student having attended a private institution from 2012-2016 and was employed at the same private institution until 2018. My experience in combatting systemic violence stems from my own personal identities and activism as a student and staff member. What also draws me to this research is my use of a variety of feminist pedagogies as a junior instructor at a public institution, and how I challenge whiteness in my own approach to education. With this, I am very much looking forward to interviewing you and hearing what you can offer as your experience as a [faculty/staff/student]. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix B:

Interview Questions

Role:

- How would you describe your role in the university? (Student/Instructor/Staff)
 - How long have you been in this role?
 - What makes you passionate in your role?
- How do you prioritize feminism in your role?
- How do you prioritize care for self/others in your role?
 - How does it impact the greater university community?
- How does your role in the university build a sense of community? (unions/organizations)
 - What does it look like?
 - Is community building valued in the university?

“Diversity Work”:

- How would you define diversity?
 - How is diversity incorporated into your role? (Class taught, mission of dept/center, interest in courses)
- What are some of the biggest challenges you encounter with diversity work?
 - How do you approach these challenges? (As a collective/individually, radical/passive)
 - How would you describe the university response?
- How would you describe diversity on campus? Is your campus diverse?
- How would you describe your university diversity statement?
 - Or approach to diversity and inclusion?
 - Does this align with your own feminist practice? Why/why not?
- How does your university prioritize diversity?
 - Is it enough? Do you have critiques?

University Structure:

- Have you experienced or are aware of any form of discrimination on campus? Whether it be in the classroom/office or structural?
 - Could you give an example?
- How would you describe racism?
- How would you describe white supremacy?
 - Based on your description, does your university participate in white supremacy?
 - If so, what ways do you think your university participates in white supremacist culture?
 - If not, what ways does your university prevent white supremacy?
- What does injustice look like in the university?
 - Are you able to be vocal against injustice?
 - What are the implications/affirmations of being vocal?
- Historically universities have made structural changes stemming from activism. How would you describe activism?
 - What does activism look like for the various roles on campus—students, staff, faculty?
 - Is activism supported on your campus?
 - Are you aware of any history of activism at your university?
 - How would you describe activism on your campus today?