

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A WHITE ANTIRACIST IDENTITY

Kathleen Kordesh – Whiteness and the University



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Overview:

A preliminary exploration into the literature on white racial attitudes suggests that there is a unique type of racial awareness that some white individuals develop, which researchers have entitled “Antiracist”.

White Antiracists are characterized by having a deep understanding of modern racism, including institutional racism and White privilege, coupled with a lifelong commitment to oppose racism in their daily lives.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the process behind how certain White people develop an Antiracist identity through qualitative methods.

Research Question:

What unique process do White individuals undergo to achieve an antiracist identity; what are the factors related to that process?

Preliminary Findings: Themes

- 1) All three participants’ understanding of modern racism was closely related to their experiences with diversity at home and at school while growing up.
- 2) Being aware of racism made participants feel frustration and sometimes guilt for being White in a system that privileges whites.
- 3) All participants have taken a number of diversity courses at U of I, and say that having knowledge and formal instruction on these topics has helped them even further understand racism and better equipped them for how to talk about these issues with other people.
- 4) The main way participants oppose racism in their daily lives is through individual interactions, by speaking out when they hear a racist comment or see a racist action.

Theme	Quote
Experiences w/diversity at home	"My mother...was divorced...so we were members of this church but we weren't actually allowed to be members...you have to do all the things that everybody else does but you're not going to have these equal rights. So I kind of became really aware early on of kind of that, those exclusionary intolerances."
	"Being an American-born white person in that situation in the school that was primarily immigrants and non-white students was definitely a wake-up call...I had a better education growing up because I grew up in the white suburbs and went to a parochial school so I definitely also automatically did better in classes and it was clear to me that a lot of that was systemic and we had very different privileges in our preparation."
Feeling frustrated and/or guilty about racism	"I would get promoted...even though I...[had] a lot less experience than someone who was non-white, that was really hard to watch...when you start to become really aware of it in that sense...I did feel really guilty, I did feel frustrated because when you're in that situation it seems like such a big thing."
Influence of diversity courses on understanding of racism	"I've had the opportunity to get some education about how to talk about it, and how to challenge people on values in a way that's kind of encouraging them to question them rather than just being challenging and putting people on the defensive, and I don't think I had that education 3, 4, or 5 years ago."
Taking action against racism in daily interactions	"...the class I teach we have a whole week on essentially cultural competency and thinking about privilege and oppression, because most of our students are white suburban kids from Chicago...I can't necessarily change anybody's prejudicial behavior but if I can take these 12 people and encourage to them to think about where that behavior comes from and where those values come from and to be aware of them..."