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ACCOUNTING FOR RACIAL PRIVILEGE
IN WHITE ANTIRACIST RHETORICS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of
The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, white antiracist rhetors traditionally oppose racism as a sociopolitical injustice committed against people of color. Although obviously accurate, this understanding requires further analysis, for it does not acknowledge that white racial privilege exists nor that white people need to change their overadvantaged racial status. Without this acknowledgment, white rhetors overlook how whiteness functions as a normative ideal in their antiracist rhetoric and practice. Therefore, despite their best intentions, white rhetors reinscribe racism into their antiracist efforts, not necessarily through prejudice against others but by protecting white racial privilege as a normative standard.

To improve their antiracist efforts, white rhetors need to acknowledge white racial privilege and identify how it functions in their daily lives. An examination of the moral, epistemological, and relational conditions of privilege is followed by an analysis of their effects in two case studies of white antiracist rhetoric. To promote interracial dialogue on white antiracism, womanist
literature on white privilege and its recommendations for change are surveyed. Suggestions are made for white feminists to develop compassionate communication skills and an antiracist rhetoric that considers power, position, and process in future white antiracist efforts.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Natalie Goldberg describes writing as “a communal act,” one in which a writer is not alone in the writing process and is not separate from what she writes about. I knew the latter to be true, but I did not experience a sense of community until I began writing my dissertation. During all my hours in front of the computer, I wrote in the good company of the four scholars who comprise my dissertation committee. Sonja Foss is the best adviser I can imagine: she balances confidence in me—allowing me to write about what I find important—with close readings of and thoughtful commentary on my work. She also has an incredible eye for detail that the accolade "grammar goddess" cannot encompass; Sonja’s attention to consistency improved the coherence in my thinking and writing.

Brenda Brueggemann’s rapid responses were both gracious and incisive—a really rare combination I hope to emulate with future students. She has been the friend writers wish for and depend on when they think of a muse. Mary Garrett was key in clarifying the approach I needed to blend theory
and practice. As I wrote I often recalled that, in response to her questioning, I promised to critique others in a way in which I would want to be critiqued and to suggest specific changes for white antiracist rhetors. This promise kept me grounded in the need for accountability.

Both Jackie Royster and Josina Makau—a fifth scholar originally on the committee but affiliated now with another institution—recognized the spirit in which I was working before I developed a tenable framework. Jackie Royster’s clear vision identified the potential of this project and her candor helped maintain the integrity of this complex work. Throughout the process, her spirit greatly influenced my sense of purpose and commitment to meaningful scholarship. Josina Makau’s early input was similarly influential. As a communication ethicist, she required her students to understand a person’s position from their point of view before we could claim to have made an informed decision on whether to agree or disagree. This simple yet uncommon step is part of what makes Josina Makau an excellent teacher and a singularly skillful mediator: she practices her theory of respect for differences.

My academic community also extends to the kindred
spirits with whom I went to graduate school. I am particularly indebted to my dissertation writing group colleagues, Sharon Varallo and Ted Matula, whose patient listening and advice helped me think through the numerous “thought knots” I encountered in my writing. I also deeply appreciate Brian McGee’s guidance, Jim Fredal’s generous spirit, Laura Hahn’s support and interest, Pam Tracy and Ashwini Tambe’s collaborative work ethic, Kellie Hay’s challenges and encouragement, and Darlene Drummond’s heartfelt reception of this endeavor.

The Marty family--my father, mother, and six sisters--never questioned that I could make it through graduate school. In many ways, their unwavering expectation enabled me to persist and also find joy in the experience. Finally, I am profoundly grateful to Debra Moddelmog. Her practical experience as a scholar helped me to pace the process as her kind and keen intellect assisted me in improving the quality of my work. Even more meaningful is how Debra teaches me to engage any effort with a sense of spacious commitment--her own ability to cradle caring and risk-taking in a devoted relationship embodies this practice and fosters my trust in compassionate, just communication.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................. ii
Acknowledgments ........................................... iv
Vita.......................................................... vii

Chapters:
1. Introduction.............................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem................................. 6
   Significance of the Study................................. 8
   Survey of the Literature................................ 9
   Method................................................... 36
   Data.................................................. 49
   Limitations............................................ 53
   Structure of the Study................................ 54

2. White Antiracist Rhetoric as Apologia: Wendell Berry’s The Hidden Wound................................. 56


5. Conclusion................................................ 165
Endnotes................................................... 176
List of References......................................... 181
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done.
And the treasures that prevail.
   - Adrienne Rich
   “Diving into the Wreck” (1972/1984)

Despite their best intentions, white antiracists who speak publicly about race relations still feel anxious about committing a racial gaffe or having to struggle with responses that reveal their racism. White feminists, in particular, are quite candid about this “double-fear (of actually doing the wrong thing/of being seen to do the wrong thing)” (Perrault, 1994, p. 227). So persistent is this uncertainty that it “is sometimes strong enough to stop [white feminists] from attempting to work against racism” (Perrault, p. 227), even though they know successful antiracist efforts benefit their lives as white women and the lives of people of color.
As a white feminist who wants to improve her antiracist efforts, I have found this fear emanates in part from not knowing how to envision a white antiracist practice that changes the racist things I say or do. I don’t know how to articulate the tenets of white antiracism because I don’t always know when what I say and do is racist. This ignorance is a singularly stunning feature most white antiracists share and with which we must contend. Unfortunately, we also can be unaware of our racist ignorance and be immobilized by the lack of confidence we have in overcoming it. As one white antiracist feminist laments, “If you want to do good, and you don’t know good from bad, you can’t move” (Frye, 1992, p. 148). Consequently, one incentive for this project is to learn how to move out from between the rock and a hard spot that are racist ignorance and an immoral inertia.

As a communication ethicist, I want to explore how white antiracist rhetoric maintains this untenable situation and why it persists despite white rhetors’ desire for racial justice. I begin with the premise that rhetoric is epistemic, that is, that dialogues are capable of generating knowledge and are not restricted to simply conveying preconceived positions (Scott, 1967, p. 13). Accordingly, if white antiracist rhetoric has the potential to create a
transformative racial practice and consistently fails to do so, then I have to wonder whether the way white antiracists talk about racism affects what we know about it and what we do to change it. Therefore, I propose to examine white antiracist rhetoric to ascertain what white people are saying about race, how what is being said shapes what can be known about racism and, thus, what options can be conceived to promote racial justice.

Clearly, I also need to attend to the silence surrounding white antiracist ignorance and the despair of overcoming it in myself and in the white antiracists I study. This task represents one of the most formidable aspects of this project because, as Marilyn Frye declares, "All of my ways of knowing seemed to have failed me--my perception, my common sense, my good will, my anger, honor and affection, my intelligence and insight" (1992, p. 148). I, too, have felt this way and might have relinquished this research agenda had I not learned that this moment of despair nearly always indicates the threshold of a breakthrough. In order to cross over, I must meet the source of my despair--the fear of knowing my own racism--with compassion and a commitment to move from ignorance to awareness.
The commitment to address my fear and become more aware of the ways in which I am racist also requires me to become “newly accountable” to the question, “Having described [my racism], what will I do to lessen or end it?” (McIntosh, 1988/1992, p. 71). Given the enormity of the problem and how it relentlessly endures in myself and other white people in U. S. society, I sometimes draw a total blank in response to this question. At moments like these, despair and a retreat to ignorance and passivity can carry a racist appeal, even for this antiracist. Evading this question, however, bypasses an opportunity, albeit a painful one, to cross a threshold and understand what racism has done to me as a white person and to my relationships with other white people and people of color.

The question of white people’s accountability reconfigures the study of racism and also reshapes antiracist theory and practice. Concern about white people who express no ill will toward people of other races yet maintain their racial privilege lead some antiracist scholars to the conclusion that white racism persists because it is a “strategy for the maintenance of privilege [more so than the perpetuation of] prejudice” (Wellman, 1993, p. 60). This theoretical revisioning means that racism provides white people with “an invisible package of
unearned assets" that "confers dominance [and] gives permission to control" (McIntosh, 1986/1992, pp. 71, 77) while prejudice--the traditional mainstay of research on racism--is but one means toward this end. Understanding racism as white racial privilege also suggests that white antiracists must become accountable for racial privilege, and not focus solely on helping people of color deal with racist effects, in order for their antiracist practice to be ethical and effective.

In this conceptual reconfiguration, each white person needs to gauge the level of his or her own participation in white privilege qua racism. This assessment must take into account the determined ignorance white people generally maintain toward racism and the ways in which this ignorance functions to normalize racial privilege. Because white people generally experience racial privilege as normal, it virtually is invisible to us. Under these conditions, an evaluation of one's own level of participation in racial privilege is exceedingly complex. Nevertheless, as white people in the U. S., we all have some access to its material resources and cultural capital and must make the effort to become accountable for these racist advantages if we are genuinely to promote racial equality.
The first step, then, is to recognize white racial privilege and incorporate that awareness into antiracist theory and practice. This step is facilitated, I believe, by changing the ways white people typically relate to whatever level of racial privilege we experience. In other words, we need to transform the defensive feelings of despair, ignorance, and passivity we regularly express in our racially privileged rhetoric and actions because these means of dealing with racism block our antiracist efforts. If we can change these types of resistance and work compassionately with our own racism, my hope for myself and other white people is that we then can change how we participate in racial privilege and collectively struggle to overcome our roles in perpetuating racism.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Unfortunately, the concept of whiteness, let alone that of white racial privilege, is virtually nonexistent in rhetorical studies. Its absence as an analytical category is due in part to communication scholars' silence on the topic of white antiracist rhetoric. When rhetoricians analyze discourse on race, they usually focus on intentionally racist speech, such as the rhetoric of organized white supremacists and on the harmful effects that racist speech has on people of color (McPhail, 1994). Both
areas of investigation are important and are not at odds with my focus on racial privilege in white antiracist rhetoric. Rather, I hope to add to the communication scholarship on racial discourse by examining how white rhetors reinscribe racist assumptions and values into their antiracist rhetoric to protect their racial privilege.

The rhetorical constructs I undertake to study—white privilege, antiracism, and whiteness—are new to communication studies. They also are relatively new in the dominant cultural consciousness. In fact, antiracist isn’t even found in most dictionaries, even though sociologists estimate that 15 percent of white Americans actively support black civil rights (Feagin and Vera, 1995, p. 172). Faced with this scholarly void, I turned to the “the words as maps” and followed the semantic path of privilege. As the literature survey will show, the many meanings of privilege have far-reaching consequences for a people’s identity and their ways of knowing and relating with others. Three research questions guide my overall analysis of the effects of racial privilege on white antiracist rhetoric and practice:

1) What is racial privilege? How can it be invisible to white people but defended by us at the same time?
2) How does white privilege, acting as presumption, structure antiracist rhetorical strategies?

3) Can the rhetorical effects of white privilege and their adverse effects on antiracist theory and practice be overcome? If so, how?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Antiracist rhetoric is vital to social change. The ways white people talk about antiracist theory and practice shape the possibilities for racial equality. Currently, most white antiracist rhetoric in the U.S. is undermined by the presumption of white racial privilege. Therefore, identifying white racial privilege and its debilitating role in antiracist rhetoric is critical to theorizing a more ethical and effective antiracist practice. This intellectual awareness of racism is facilitated greatly if white people relate compassionately to their privilege and the racist circumstances it creates rather than defensively resist any knowledge of personal or collective accountability. Intellectual awareness and compassionate regard may enable white people to become better interracial allies in closing the gap between the theory of racial equality and the experience of racist practices.
A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Privilege has its etymological roots in Roman jurisprudence, according to feminist philosopher Lynne Tirrell (1993), and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the exemption of one individual from the operation of the law” (cited in Tirrell, p. 17). My own Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary lists privilege as deriving from the 12th-century term, privilegium, meaning a “law for or against a private person.” It also defines privilege as “a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor: prerogative; esp[ecially] such a right or immunity attached specif[ically] to position or office.” Privilege as a verb and privileged as an adjective appear two centuries later and with broader meanings. Webster’s provides a circular definition of the verb form, saying, it is “to grant a privilege to,” while it defines the adjective in three ways: 1) having or enjoying one or more privileges, as in “privileged classes”; 2) not subject to the usual rules or penalties because of some special circumstance, especially not subject to disclosure in a court of law, as in “privileged communication”; and 3) having a plenary indulgence attached to a mass celebrated thereon, as in “a privileged altar.” Overall, privilege

9
carries significant perks for those who can claim the advantages or have them bestowed.

Synonyms for *privilege* reinforce the term’s positive valence as a special benefit or advantage. Examining a list of the synonyms for privilege reveals this bias. *The Synonym Finder* by J. I. Rodale (1986) lists the synonyms for privilege as:

1. Right, prerogative, due, entitlement, birthright, benefit, advantage, authorization, permission, leave, consent, sanction, warrant, allowance, license, power, franchise; liberty, freedom, choice, blanket permission, carte blanche, immunity, exemption, exception, dispensation, indulgence, concession.

And for privilege as a verb:

1. Exempt, free from, excuse, release, except, make an exception, exclude (*all in reference to something otherwise forbidden*) authorize, empower, license, permit, allow.

Three sets of synonyms are provided for privilege as an adjective:

1. Favored, entitled, advantaged, unaccountable, not liable, exempt, exempted, immune, excused, released, excepted, granted dispensation,
indulged, suffered, accommodated, protected, sheltered, *Inf.* spoiled.

2. Allowed, granted, admitted, permitted, free, licensed, enfranchised, chartered, accredited; authorized, empowered, sanctioned, commissioned, charged, entrusted, invested, vested.

3. *(Of information)* confidential, off-the-record, not for publication, privy, inside, top-secret, *Inf.* eyes-only. (p. 938)

The practices represented by this list of synonyms for *privilege* collectively confer on individuals or groups the ability to do what they wish without being held responsible for the consequences. They accomplish this feat by making synonymous practices such as *power* with *unaccountability* and *secrecy*. Moreover, this license to act with *immunity* is described as a positive attribute (*liberty, freedom, choice/favored, entitled, advantaged*), deserved by those who employ it (*right, prerogative, due, entitlement, birthright*). In effect, these synonyms reveal that *privilege* is justified tautologically: privileged people can be and act any way they want because they perceive themselves and their actions positively because of who they are and what they do.
This injustice is compounded by the tautology’s ability to foreclose any concern that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.” As a state of undisputed control, privilege acknowledges only personal inconvenience through synonyms such as spoiled or suffered, hardly the stuff of absolute corruption. Fears about unbridled power also do not apply because more democratic synonyms—like liberty, freedom, and choice—thoroughly idealize privilege under the rubric of these civic virtues. Yet, even as privileged people drape themselves in patriotic rights, they excuse themselves for something otherwise forbidden, that is, living like royal tyrants at the expense of other Americans.

Herein lies the irony of privilege for white people. Clearly, we know what privilege is; we have a millennium and more experience with it, and we have embellished its meaning lavishly during that time. Why, then, do we find ourselves confronting “an elusive and fugitive subject” (McIntosh, 1986/1990, p. 75) when we try to describe and analyze white privilege? How are we able to sustain our ignorance yet simultaneously justify our power over people of other races through positive associations with liberty, freedom and choice? We may profess to know not what we do, but nevertheless, on some level, we do know how to oppress others systematically for our own material and cultural
domination. The tension between not knowing but somehow "doing" privilege presents troubling conundrums for white antiracists working on behalf of social justice.

Progressive white scholars also find their work unexpectedly undermined by their own privileges. Therefore, across the disciplines, many academics have become more self-reflexive about the effects of privilege on their own scholarship. They often address racial privilege, though some are beginning to investigate privileges claimed by other aspects of their dominant identities, particularly class and gender. Because many scholars may mention their privilege only to continue to take it for granted or to endorse its normative values, I chose to review literature that explicitly featured the concept of privilege as pivotal to feminist or other liberatory analyses. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, affirmations of privilege continue even in the literature I explored. Finally, I stayed away from the huge data base on privilege as confidential communication practices in the professions (such as attorney-client privilege or its equivalent in the health, religious, and therapeutic communities) because it did not bear directly on white antiracist rhetoric and practice.

My survey of the critical literature on privilege consists of 44 sources written between 1979 and 1995, with
1993 and 1994 emerging as watershed years. I examined essays and book-length works written largely, although not exclusively, by feminist scholars. The authors represented the fields of philosophy, literary criticism, educational theory, spiritual studies and theology, psychology, sociology, and, to a lesser extent, American studies, political science, critical legal theory, and journalism. I also included a few activists without any academic affiliation. Noticeably, rhetoricians from English and communication studies are absent, for they have not yet studied privilege per se, although such a focus may be implied within feminist and postmodern theories of rhetoric.

I organize my review around three thematics that emerged from the literature: the epistemic, moral, and relational conditions of privilege. I have alluded to the first two themes in the discussion of white privilege as an unjust and difficult-to-know (because “elusive and fugitive”) subject. By relational conditions I mean the ways in which privileged people create over-advantaged relationships at the expense of others. Although presented separately for the purpose of analytic description, my review quickly will demonstrate that all three conditions are interdependent.
Each author surveyed examines one or more of these three themes. Together, they inadvertently produce a contradictory portrait of privilege. The intertextual tensions found in their work stem from the clash between the positive valence of privilege—which allows extraordinary access to material resources and cultural capital—and its negative valence, which reveals that allowance to be immoral and unjust. These contradictions result in an analytic smorgasbord regarding what scholars conclude about privilege as well as their recommendations for action.

THE EPISTEMIC CONDITIONS OF PRIVILEGE

Peggy McIntosh, a white feminist scholar, has written the most widely cited and influential article on privilege, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies" (1986/1992). In her essay, she parallels men’s unwillingness to acknowledge their gender privilege with her own latent recognition of her white racial privilege. She finds that men who concede that women are disadvantaged by gender politics and white people who recognize that people of color are discriminated against do not follow their logic to its obvious conclusion: if women and people of color are disadvantaged, men and white women must be over-advantaged. In fact, dominant group members often will deny that
privilege “has opened any doors for them personally” (p. 72). The common denial leads McIntosh to conclude that, “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (p. 71). Unsatisfied with these prospects, she proceeds to look for the effects of white privilege in her own life.

McIntosh compiles an “ungeneralizable” list of “forty-six ordinary and daily ways in which I experience having white privilege, by contrast with my African American colleagues . . .” (p. 71). Having used McIntosh’s list in the classroom many times, I can report that the contents provoke rancorous debate and, quite often, thoughtful reflection. Still, the content of the list is less significant here than the embattled process of coming to know it. McIntosh experienced difficulty cataloguing privileged effects because she “repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until [she] wrote them down” (p. 75). She attributes this forgetfulness to the “pressure [she feels] to avoid” the topic, “for in facing it,” she admits,

I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If [this list is] true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors
open for certain people through no virtues of their own. These perceptions mean also that my moral condition is not what I had been led to believe. (pp. 75-76)

The pressure to forget her racial privilege, even as she attempts to realize it, made white privilege "an elusive and fugitive subject" (p. 75).

These memory lapses demonstrate the anti-epistemic effects of white privilege: the inability or reluctance to recognize one's racial advantages, let alone how they compromise white people's "moral condition" in relation to people of other races and our own democratic principles. These intersections among the epistemic, moral, and relational conditions of privilege also reveal, as I noted earlier, their analytic interdependence. Therefore, even in this section's description of privileged ways of knowing--and more significantly, not knowing--moral and relational concerns are ever present.

The "forgetfulness" McIntosh describes represents one of the most persistent issues among the authors mentioning epistemic concerns. McIntosh herself develops its description into a more systemic analysis. She writes, "In my class and place, I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of
meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring racial dominance on my group from birth" (p. 81, emphasis added). A system of racial dominance that is invisible to its members results in more than individual forgetfulness of one's white privilege. It creates grand scale "[o]bliviousness about white advantage" (p. 81).

More often than either forgetfulness or obliviousness, the name many authors give to the anti-epistemic conditions of privilege is ignorance. It most often describes privileged people's lack of awareness about oppressed people's experiences but also refers to privileged people's ignorance of themselves and the effects of their actions. Marilyn Frye, in "On Being White" (1983), explains "the mechanisms of ignorance" (p. 120) in racial privilege. Her comments ensue from her appeal to "educate oneself" in order to overcome white privilege. "Ignorance is not something simple," she writes, and it is not a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state. Ignorance of this sort--the determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrichlike ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most
white Americans have of Black language—ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences. (p. 118)

As is clear from her description, Frye perceives racial ignorance to be "complex and willful" (p. 120), an insidious choice white people make to know or not know about oppressed races.

Other authors offer more benign interpretations. Like Frye, feminist philosopher Terri Elliott focuses on ignorance as the result of actions taken; yet, the willfulness is not so apparent. "Different activities foster different ways of knowing," she writes as she offers one of the very few (if not the only) illustrations of able-bodied privilege:

Person A approaches a building and enters it unproblematically. As she approaches she sees something perfectly familiar which, if asked, she might call The Entrance. Person X approaches the same building and sees a great stack of stairs and the glaring lack of a ramp for his wheelchair.

(1994, p. 426)

Ignorance, in this case, derives not so much from malicious intentions but more from the perception of whether something is "usable" (p. 428).
For the able-bodied person entering the building, the entrance is "unproblematically" usable and, therefore, "perfectly familiar." Access to the building then can be taken completely for granted for person A, rendering her the "privilege of ignorance" regarding person X's experience (p. 426). The lack of a ramp, however, impedes person X's access, making strange the familiar act of entering a building because it is unusable for him. Of this contrast, Elliott concludes, "aspects of the social order are conspicuous for oppressed people because they are unusable for them" (p. 429).

The context for Elliott's explanation suggests that she is not trying to excuse privileged ignorance or "blame the victim" for the unusability of the entrance. Rather, she argues that knowledge of (un)usability is established through our activities--our ways of engaging the world--and does not reside inherently in our privileged or oppressed bodies. This holds true for the other examples Elliott provides, whether they deal with racial privilege in the literary canon or sexist language in a course on the philosophy of religion. In any of these situations, Elliott maintains, ignorance becomes problematic not in and of itself but when "repeated complaints [of unusability] reveal a pattern of oppression" (p. 432).
The usability standard and the means for redress relieves dominant people of any responsibility for creating conditions that serve them at the expense of others. Instead, responsibility for change to occur lies with the oppressed who must complain repeatedly that they find the situation unusable. Until then and up to the point when dominant people acknowledge the oppressive pattern, they may operate from their position of privileged ignorance without accountability.

For example, privileged ignorance functions in white people's "unaware/unintentional racism," which Gloria Yamato describes in her aptly titled essay, "Something About the Subject Makes it Hard to Name" (1990). Yamato, a black feminist, shares her experience with this form of racism. She writes that unaware/unintentional racism "has led white people to believe that it's just fine to ask if they can touch my hair (while reaching). They then exclaim how soft it is, how it does not scratch their hand" (p. 21). Elliott's method for social change might not be of any assistance here were Yamato not to complain, were she not to repeat her complaint, or were her repeated complaints insufficient to establish a "pattern" of oppressive behavior. More important, Elliot's method requires that the harm already be done.
People who are determinedly ignorant also can resist any compulsion to change by isolating people who complain. Patricia Williams recollects a walking tour in Harlem, where she was the only black person participating in a group otherwise composed of “young white urban-professional real-estate speculators” (1991, p. 71). About halfway through the tour, she recalls, “the guide asked the group if they wanted to ‘go inside some churches. It’ll make the tour a little longer; but we’ll probably get to see some services going on . . . . Easter Sunday in Harlem is quite a show’” (p. 71). Although no one from the churches had been asked and, Williams feels, an analogous move by black people peering into white people’s synagogues or cathedrals would be regarded as disrespectful, her solitary objections were overruled (p. 71).

Complaints may be disregarded, Williams finds out, when the privileged deny the reality of the complainant. The other tour participants, she continues, deflected my observation with comments like “We just want to look,” “No one will mind,” and “There’s no harm intended.” As well-intentioned as they were, I was left with the impression that no one existed for them who could not be governed by their intentions. (pp. 71-72)
In other words, if people could not be governed by the tour participants’ good intentions, they must not matter or even be real.

To say that ignorance is anti-epistemic might seem redundant, but it need not be if people are willing to learn. Ignorance becomes anti-epistemic only when trapped within the tautology of privilege, where non-privileged versions of reality are unjustified and the ignorant intentions of the privileged constantly reauthorize themselves. “To live so completely impervious to one’s own impact on others,” says Williams, “is a fragile privilege, which over time relies not simply on the willingness but on the inability of others—in this case blacks—to make their displeasure heard” (p. 72).

Both Yamato’s and Williams’ circumstances reveal how Elliott’s method for social change requires the oppressed to educate the privileged even if they don’t want to learn. In her own example of unusable building entrances, Elliott’s position that the privileged ignorance of able-bodied people is not malicious and that disabled people should complain fails to consider how ableism establishes a communicative norm in favor of able-bodied perspectives. This norm not only places the burden of proof of “usability” on disabled people, but it also allows able-bodied people to disregard
or invalidate disabled perspectives as unreasonable because they are outside the norm. In effect, disabled people cannot access a reasonable burden of proof within an ableist rhetoric nor can they legitimately replace it with a more hospitable rhetorical paradigm. Instead, they must tap into tenets of other dominant rhetorics—such as equity or productive citizenship—to promote social change.

When the process of change is seen from the perspective of the oppressed, argues Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, privileged ignorance must be understood as power. In her essay, "Privilege of Unknowing" (1988), Sedgwick, like Elliott, describes ignorance as an epistemological privilege. Sedgwick also asserts, following Frye, that privileged people maintain their power through ignorance about the people they oppress and the effects of that oppression. Yet, the determined innocence of Elliott’s able-bodied access and the calculated hostility of Frye’s white racial privilege are missing in Sedgwick’s analysis. Instead, she points to the ironic control of the lowest common denominator.

To illustrate, Sedgwick describes communication between the presidents of France and the United States. “If M. Mitterand knows English but Mr. Reagan lacks French,” she writes, “it is the urbane M. Mitterand who must negotiate in
an acquired tongue, the ignorant Mr. Reagan who may dilate in his native one" (p. 102). Consequently, the more powerful participant in the negotiations is able, through his ignorance, to impose a communicative burden on the less powerful participant, thereby literally establishing the language of engagement on his own terms.

The control enabled by a lowest-common-denominator brand of privileged ignorance, according to Sedgwick, can be "harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale" (p. 102) that solidifies dominant power. For example, "the laws that govern rape," she argues, "privilege at the same time men and ignorance: inasmuch as it matters not at all what the raped woman perceives or wants just so long as the man raping her can claim not to have noticed" (p. 102). Therefore, like President Mitterand, women are forced to articulate their position in terms established by the ignorant powerful but, unlike Mitterand, their experiences are likely to be invalidated by the misogynistic language itself. Few narratives that could legitimate a rape victim's experience are allowed by the lowest common denominator of the rapist's and the court's privileged ignorance.

All these cases--Yamato's, Williams', and Sedgwick's--make evident that living outside "unusable" privileged
narratives is dangerous for the oppressed. What also needs to be acknowledged is that, for the privileged, living inside their protected narratives is a lie. Consider the privileged ignorance of misogynistic rape narratives. Their institutionalized prevalence creates a "rape culture" whereby "men who rape construct their social reality by drawing on cultural values and beliefs to justify and excuse their behavior" (Ellison, 1993, p. 100). Yet, even when convicted of wrongdoing, rapists can utilize these same values and beliefs to sustain their privileged ignorance, much the same way liars defend their lies.  

For example, some convicted rapists admit "rape is morally reprehensible and that women rightly fear violence," but they attribute their actions "to forces beyond their control," such as substance abuse or emotional problems (Ellison, p. 100). Other convicted rapists deny their actions were wrong. They justify their behavior by drawing on "cultural stereotypes about men as sexually masterful and women as coy but seductive" (p. 101). Either way, the rapists do not acknowledge abusing their over-advantaged power as men when they rape women. Instead, they maintain privileged ignorance of their responsibility through misogynistic narratives and "a pronounced ability to ignore or misinterpret how they appear to their victims" (p. 101).
These prolific appeals to ignorance are also reasoning fallacies. Several authors in the survey note how uniformly privileged people resort to these fallacies, particularly to protect their status. Composition theorists Sheryl Fontaine, John Peavoy, and Susan Hunter (1990) describe how their privileged students, when asked to explain social inequities, typically commit the same reasoning errors. They produce non-sequitur solutions, create double standards, and indulge in special pleading without ever acknowledging their errors or how they support their privileged status.

Similar reasoning processes separate privileged from oppressed people when white students denounce affirmative action while maintaining their allegiance to freedom and equal opportunity. In *Portraits of White Racism* (1993), sociologist David Wellman distinguishes four rhetorical strategies aimed at defending racial and class privileges. Each strategy is supported by a variety of reasons. They are: 1) affirmative action doesn’t really help the disadvantaged; 2) affirmative action helps the disadvantaged unfairly; 3) those who are helped are not truly disadvantaged; and 4) affirmative action is reverse discrimination and disadvantages white people (pp. 226-232). In Wellman’s analysis, fallacious reasoning was
inconsequential to the success of the strategy. Rather, students successfully protected their privilege by universally "ignor[ing] the benefits of whiteness" (p. 232). Bolstered by a presumption of equality, white students confidently assessed the attributes and situations of the oppressed in their first three strategies, even as they claim the problems of inequity as their own into the fourth.

The affirmative-action assessments, like the non-sequitur solutions offered by the elite composition students, do not help the oppressed. Instead, "the only thing they 'solve,'" writes Wellman, "is the contradiction that racial inequality represents for white people and American ideology" (p. 210). With all its fallacies, entrenched ignorance, and inaccurate presumptions, privileged reasoning cannot truly resolve the epistemological contradictions that racism presents for white people. Rather, it functions to mask the fact that, as Elizabeth Spelman observes, "the 'problem of difference' is really the problem of privilege" (1988, p. 162).

THE MORAL CONDITIONS OF PRIVILEGE

Discussions regarding the moral conditions of privilege are extremely underdeveloped. Many authors surveyed, even if critical of the political dimensions of privilege, remark upon how they "enjoy" its benefits of material well-being
and cultural authority. These aspects of privilege represent the positive valence that dominant people wish to hold on to and protect. They also lure oppressed people into adopting privileged standards and even "passing" as a more powerful gender, race, class, able body, or sexual orientation.

Once privileged, people resist a change in status, which, if it occurred, they would experience as a deep loss. Privileged people often implicitly refer to this loss by contemplating what they would have to "give up" in order to oppose inequities produced by capitalism, for example, or how they would have to reconfigure their own romantic relationships if they analyzed them for heterosexism. Without widely understood or accepted alternatives, privileged people defend their moral condition through a variety of means rather than attempt to change their privileged status.

The positive estimation of privileged living is so pervasive that people can perceive privilege as necessary for self-determination. In a classic manifesto, the Combahee River Collective--a black lesbian feminist socialist group--face entrenched obstacles in their struggle against interlocking oppressions because, they write, "we do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to
rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privileges have" (1983, p. 277). To be without privilege, then, is to be without power.

Privilege and empowerment become interchangeable when privileged conditions replace inalienable rights. When this happens, "food, housing, health care, education, bodily autonomy, love, respect, and self-determination as peoples can be termed privileges because of their inequitable distribution" (Chater, 1994, p. 102, emphasis added). The rhetorical slippage between privilege and rights—recall, they are synonymous—also can be used against oppressed groups fighting for their civil rights, as when Christian Coalition activists brand anti-discrimination laws protecting gays and lesbians as "special privileges."

Clearly, the moral condition of privilege is not positive, even if some of its effects currently are vital to a people's quality of life. Despite its material and cultural rewards, some critics still recognize privilege as unmistakably corrupt. Paula Ross, for example, declares that "privilege, almost by definition, requires that someone else pay the price for its enjoyment" (1987, p. 218). Oppressed people know they pay for privileged people's rewards, but, typically, privileged people do not recognize
the burdens they impose on others nor the immoral costs they themselves pay. A few, however, are trying to understand.

In her autobiographical essay, “Class/Act: Beginning a Translation from Privilege” (1989), Susanna J. Sturgis describes the process of coming to awareness about the moral condition exacted by her family’s rise to upper-class status:

I come from one “old Boston family” and am related to most of the others. When I learned in elementary school that some men had wanted George Washington for a king, I already knew enough of my place to think immediately, “I could have been a princess!” Now I look around at everything that enrages me, at every institution that destroys human beings and ruins the earth, that decides who is expendable and what is worth noticing, and I know from history and the newspapers that it has been created by my male ancestors and cousins and by those who act in their names. There is evil in the soil that nourished me, that gave me my voice. Whole cultures have been destroyed. So many people, nations, and countries that once grew according to their own ways have been bent and
distorted for the master’s pleasure and nourishment. (p. 9)

Sturgis’s indictment of her family history reveals the price privileged people pay for their status—-they trade their moral condition (“There is evil in the soil that nourished me”) for material and cultural rewards. To prevent public and personal recognition of the trade-off, they overvalue privileged benefits and present them as normal and deserved.

As forthright as Sturgis is, her revelation, if not followed up with action, carries another moral risk. This risk manifests if privileged people hope that confessing might be enough to ease demands for change and assuage their own shame, guilt, and despair. Even if initially sincere, confessors who want to focus on their own anguish without acting on behalf of social justice “privilege” their own moral dilemmas over the suffering of the oppressed, leaving the latter unchanged.

Cultivating awareness through confession that is not followed up with action is a form of what Patricia Williams calls spirit murder: a “disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard” (1991, p. 73). For the people whom the privileged oppress, this disregard can be and often is catastrophic. Through spirit murder, privileged people also harm themselves, for their
callousness requires they accept as normal “a system of formalized distortions of thought” and “social structures [that] center on fear and hate” (p. 73). To maintain the illusion that the immoral conditions of privilege are normal, privileged people sacrifice their integrity and thus lose their capacity to co-exist peacefully among themselves and with others.

THE RELATIONAL CONDITIONS OF PRIVILEGE

An immoral sense of entitlement translates into an inability to relate with others except at their expense, or, as Lynne Tirrell pithily sums up the situation in the case of gender relations, “his privilege is her prohibition” (1993, p. 18). Even if men concede that sexism exists and harms women, gender relations still suffer because, Peggy McIntosh observes, “only rarely will a man go beyond acknowledging that women are disadvantaged to acknowledging that men have unearned advantage, or that unearned privilege has not been good for men’s developments as human beings” (1986/1990, p. 71). Men deny sexism’s damage to themselves because they perceive sexism as a “women’s issue” that does not affect men’s understanding of their own lives as “morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (p. 73). In short, men see themselves as separate from and unaffected by the sexist effects of their gender privilege.

33
The belief that men, or any other privileged group, can hold themselves apart from the immorality of their own privilege is another effect of their disregard toward the people they oppress. To sustain this sense of interpersonal or group immunity, men eventually must abandon their role in relationships with others as a meaningful aspect of their lives. Marvin Ellison describes this facet of spirit murder:

By internalizing male gender privilege as permission to discount women’s experience, needs, and perspectives, men are cut off from the humanizing that occurs only through everyday contact with—and accountability to—real persons in real relations where claim-making is reciprocal. (1993, p. 102)

The dehumanization men experience through their everyday “participation in oppression,” Ellison argues, “deforms [their] moral character and allows violence to escalate without internal moral check” (p. 102). It also belies the idea that sexism is “only” a women’s issue.

Aida Hurtado further disproves the illusion of privileged separation. “Each oppressed group in the United States,” she claims, “is positioned in a particular and distinct relationship to white men, and each form of
subordination is shaped by this relational position" (1989, p. 833, emphasis added). Given this interconnectedness, she theorizes that conflict between white women and women of color can be understood more fully if it is evaluated in the context of their relations with privileged white men. These positions differ, says Hurtado, in that white men "seduce" white women into supporting patriarchy through sharing race and class privilege, while they typically "reject" women of color. The imbalance of power that results creates tensions between women that cannot be understood by looking only at their relations with each other. Progressive change would occur, says Hurtado, if white women would "integrate their own privilege from association with white men into [their] analysis of gender insubordination" (p. 855).

Carl James also can attest to the fact that privileged people need to analyze how privilege and oppression interact in their lives. As an Afro-Canadian professor of economics, James tells numerous stories concerning how his students struggle with his authority as a teacher. While gender and class privilege bestow some cultural authority upon him, white students often challenge his professorial ethos through their negative attitudes regarding his race. Their hostility demonstrates to James that even though he is a professor, his professional status "does not make [him]
immune to the stereotypes and concomitant issues and problems that go along with being a racial minority, and a Black person in particular, in [Canadian] society” (p. 51). Rather, student accusations of bias, prejudice, and racism prevail particularly when employment equity or other racially stratified economic situations become the topic of classroom discussion (p. 49).

All these examples of privileged relationships show that privilege is not a static identity inherent or lacking in a person. Rather, privilege is analyzed more effectively as an immoral process that confers dominance on some as it assigns an oppressed status to others. This process often continues unchecked because privilege people’s anti-epistemic rhetoric masks the immoral and unjust means people use to acquire and maintain privileged positions of power.

METHOD

Adrienne Rich poses the question, “Suppose we were to ask ourselves simply: What does a woman need to know to become a self-conscious, self-defining human being” (1986, pp. 1-2)? If the literature review tells us anything, it demonstrates that privileged women probably will answer this question differently from oppressed women. Privileged women might even question why they need gender-specific knowledge to be fully developed human beings. For them, the “glass
"ceiling" is not gender discrimination in the workplace but a phenomenon that women who do not try "hard enough" or know "how to play the game" bring on themselves. Oppressed women, too, may challenge gender-specific knowledge if they experience discrimination as based predominantly on race, class, or some other identity. Conversely, both groups may conclude that they must develop gender-based knowledge as separatists, although, most likely, privileged women would separate themselves from men and oppressed women would separate from privileged women. How does a feminist rhetorician begin to sort out debates like these?

The rhetorical method I am proposing takes into consideration a speaker’s position, power, and his or her communicative process. Looking first at position, the example above and the literature review clearly indicate that "a speaker’s [social] location is epistemically salient" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 98). In other words, how speakers relate to their identities significantly shapes what they can or are willing to know. This link between identities and the content of knowledge is not necessarily positive or negative. Yet, "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous" (Alcoff, p. 99) because they inculcate ignorance—they block content that could challenge
their privilege—and thereby harm themselves and others, albeit in different ways.

White antiracists risk this danger if their rhetoric and practice "identify only with white [people]" and what they profess to know about race relations, for antiracists then find themselves "still connected to that system of objectification and callousness and cruelty called racism" (Rich, 1986, p. 80). To improve their antiracism, white rhetors need not abandon white viewpoints or try to identify only with people of color since both approaches are, at best, an avoidance. A more viable option is to draw on the multiple and contradictory experiences of whiteness, which leads to a more honest relationship to one's racial identity and, as Sandra Harding suggests, is also a relatively untapped form of "situated knowing" (1991, p. 103).

Drawing on one's privileged position to know, speak, and act is difficult because of the contradictory moral conditions brought on by the ways privileged relations preserve power for one's group at the expense of others. Privileged people's extraordinary access to material resources and cultural capital exacts an epistemic, moral, and relational toll, as revealed in the literature review. As a result, conscientious wealthy or middle-class people may try to improve class conditions, for example, without
changing their own class privilege. Understanding how this
tension manifests rhetorically is key to analyzing the gap
between the intent for social change and these oppressive
effects.

While the injustice and communicative frustrations
accompanying these tensions are apparent, their source often
is not. The disruption between intent and outcome is
difficult to observe because privilege often acts as
presumption in social change rhetoric and practice.
Presumptive reasoning can obscure privileged assumptions,
partially because assumptions are not explicit necessarily
and also because the burden of proof rests upon those who
wish to challenge the presumption. This obscurity and lack
of accountability promote the conditions where rhetors may
speak and act out of a privileged presumptive framework
relatively unaware they are doing so and thus create
resistance to their investigating the role of privilege in
their own values and praxis. Whether they are unknowing
and/or unwilling, privileged rhetors usually communicate in
ways that end up protecting their privilege, often in the
form of an apologia or through some other defensive
communicative process.

Since I, too, am racially privileged, I turned to a
source that could help me open and sustain modes of
perception that otherwise might be closed by my desire to protect and deny my white privilege. Before I describe Thich Nhat Hanh’s theory of interbeing and its relevance for white antiracist rhetoric, I want to address some of the political issues raised by my use of Vietnamese Buddhist theories that were developed in response to the United States’ invasion of Vietnam.

I was introduced to Buddhist thought by my ex-partner, also a U. S. resident, white, and middle-class, who found it personally meaningful and applicable in her work as a therapist with victims of domestic violence. She entered formal practice when she took the vows of refuge, the first stage of initiation into a sangha, or Buddhist spiritual community. I consider the introduction to be one of the most profound gifts of our relationship and, while my own relationship to Buddhist practice is still informal, it began in the context of love and partnership.

Unfortunately, though, I did not begin exploring Buddhist thought in depth until after our relationship ended (or transformed, depending on how one views the transition) and so forged my own commitment to this spiritual practice through loss. At that time, different Buddhist teachings in compassionate willingness—to work with what is, however it is—helped me work honestly with the changing conditions of
self-in-relationship. The personal growth I experienced in confronting and trying to work through difficult changes and unwelcome insights into my own limitations suggests to me that compassion aids my spiritual commitment and might help my political practice, too.

Since this initial exploration, I have begun to notice that many Western teachers of socially engaged Buddhism are white, middle class, and mostly male. I also am noticing that these Western teachers chiefly address other white, middle-class practitioners as their principal audience (which now includes me). These privileged relations seem to structure many of the teachings. For example, one assumption I encounter frequently from the teachers is that everyone's basic material needs are met. This may be true for the principal audience, but I find myself wondering about the widespread relevance of a spiritual practice that begins with this premise. On the other hand, the presence of privilege forms an ironic source of identification for me and contributes to my seeing Westernized Buddhist teachings as relevant for me.

Many white Western Buddhists are beginning to discuss how their privilege affects their spiritual practice. Rick Fields writes about these tensions in his "Confessions of a White Buddhist" (1994):
It's hardly surprising, then, that in the ongoing discussion about the meaning of an emergent "American Buddhism," it is mainly white Buddhists who are busy doing the defining. Nor is it surprising that they're defining it in their own image. . . . By insisting that they and they alone get to define what American Buddhism is, white Buddhists end up losing a great deal. (p. 55)

Fields admits he may be exaggerating this claim. Even if he is, the desire to be central in a selfless (meaning not ego-bound) spiritual practice is troubling and is one indication of how privilege may interfere with spiritual practice.

The personal experience of privilege also has political dimensions, such as the imperialist war venture that took United States soldiers to Vietnam and became the conduit for bringing socially engaged Buddhism back. The history of hostilities requires a response from socially engaged American Buddhists who quite likely would not be practitioners if the U. S. had not invaded Vietnam, for Thich Nhat Hanh developed his activist Buddhism in response to the war. If the means are the ends in the making—and I believe they are—how will U. S. Buddhists account for the
violent means through which they gained access to the spiritual tradition they have adopted?

Thich Nhat Hahn offers direction through his teachings on interconnectedness and compassion in Being Peace (1987). In this text, he describes the tenets of socially engaged Buddhism as practiced in the Tiep Hien Order (Order of Interbeing), which he founded in response to the wartime crises experienced by the Vietnamese. Thich Nhat Hanh explains the order by explaining that “tiep and hien are Vietnamese words of Chinese origin” (p. 85) whose combined meaning helps convey the spirit of interbeing.

Tiep literally means “‘to be in touch’” and directs practitioners to be in touch “with oneself in order to find out the source of wisdom, understanding, and compassion in each of us” (p. 85). It also means “‘to continue,’ to make something more long-lasting” (p. 86). This second meaning suggests that practitioners should persist in their contact with the sources of wisdom, understanding, and compassion to sustain their spiritual commitment. They are advised to work with Buddhist teachers and a sangha, or spiritual community.

The core concept of interbeing is conveyed by hien, which means “the present time” and “to make real, to manifest, realization” (p. 86). Since the present is the
only moment there really is, people must not only practice what they preach, but they must "be" or embody their teachings. When people are "being peace" there is no separation between their spiritual beliefs and their practice. In this way, tiep hien, or its English translation, interbeing, is a spiritual approach that regards all life as in touch and interconnected, or, as Thich Nhat Hahn would say, in a state of "inter-are" (p. 87).

Were Western Buddhists to "be" this socially engaged spiritual practice, they would likely atone for the violent means that produced it and act on behalf of reconciliation. They could direct their efforts according to the fourteen precepts of the Tiep Hien Order. Several of these guiding principles speak directly to the controversies wrought by privileged relations and, as such, have implications for the rhetorical method I am proposing in this research.

For example, the first and second precepts instruct socially engaged practitioners to be non-dogmatic and unattached to present points of view, including Buddhist perspectives (Nhat Hanh, pp. 89-91). These principles suggest that the communicative process affects what can be known, echoing the rhetoric-is-epistemic school of thought described earlier. More significantly, they teach people
not to reify any one point of view at the expense of others, a point privileged people should heed in particular, on account of their over-advantaged status.

These first two precepts are supported by the third, which warns against imposing one’s view onto other people or righteously denouncing their convictions (p. 91). Together, they present a strong challenge to Western conceptions of truth, argument, and persuasion, for they advocate opening up the communicative process to multiple perspectives without judgment or attempts to monopolize truth claims. This emphasis is salient particularly for Western Buddhists or white antiracists who struggle with the unintended effects of their privilege and the critical reflection they might receive from those whom they oppress.

The focus on process in the third precept also suggests that people should handle their ideological conflicts “through compassionate dialogue” in the hope that this may “help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness” (p. 91). If, for example, differences persist among antiracists and tempers flare, the eighth precept instructs: “Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small” (p. 94). People will know they are reconciled when they are “in touch with both sides” (p.
of an issue and can work toward the benefit of all involved.

The eighth and ninth precepts deal specifically with speech. While the eighth instructs practitioners to avoid harmful speech and to move toward reconciliation, the ninth precept spells out what types of harmful speech to avoid and to what lengths people should go to speak truthfully. It reads:

Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things that you are not sure of. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety. (p. 95)

This precept covers several issues of concern to privileged people. For white antiracists, who experience so much uncertainty about our own racial rhetoric and actions, this precept offers succinct guidelines to help us practice our politics ethically.

It also instructs people of conscience to act even when doing so jeopardizes their wellbeing. This teaching offers
critical advice to privileged people who may define their wellbeing in terms of their privileged status; not only are they being asked to risk their advantages, they also are asked to risk their safety. This request seems less demanding when one remembers that all life is interconnected.

When privileged power creates unbalanced relations, both privileged and oppressed people will bear the brunt of this discord. Privileged people often direct their resources and energy into ill-conceived offenses to maintain the imbalance, including hostile posturing, short-sighted economic policies, environmental pollution, and war. These global interactions deprive the people they oppress of their basic needs, creating vast suffering—such as the expanding populations of refugees—with which privileged people must contend through the expenditure of more resources and energy. Ironically, privileged people often resent dealing with the fallout of their policies, as evidenced by anti-refugee and anti-immigrant backlash.

"Being peace" in local and global interactions could help restore balance among differently empowered peoples. In his explanation of the ninth precept, Thich Nhat Hanh describes how the ethics of a communicative process affects the outcome. He writes:
the words we speak can create love, trust, and happiness around us, or create a hell. We should be careful about what we say. . . . We should speak constructively. In our speech we can try not to cause misunderstanding, hatred, or jealousy, rather to increase understanding and mutual acceptance. (pp. 95-95)

This explanation and the ninth precept speak directly to white antiracist rhetors who advocate racial justice without a commitment to changing white racial privilege.

This disjuncture in their social change agenda “create[s] a hell” in three ways: 1) white antiracists remain unaccountable for their own roles in racism and often feel angry when their efforts go unappreciated or are even opposed; 2) without accountability, white antiracists perpetuate their racial privilege as racism, regardless of their good intentions; and 3) as a result, racism continues while confusion reigns, making antiracist social change difficult to talk about and, therefore, increasing the odds against its occurrence. These racist circumstances harm everyone even as they demonstrate the need for ethical communicative processes.
DATA

In seeking data for this project, I turned to white antiracists who have a reputation as ethicists in their rhetorical theorizing and practice. Although many white rhetoricians also are communication ethicists, the accolades accorded one writer and one literary critic give them national prominence. Wendell Berry is a prolific writer—a poet, essayist, and novelist—who is well known for focusing on the ethics of language in his work and is highly regarded for his commitment to ecology. Similarly well know, Wayne Booth is considered by many rhetoricians to have produced a voluminous body of work that represents the definitive stance on ethics and rhetoric. A testament to the significance granted to Booth’s work can be found in two recent collections which focus on the impact of Booth’s writing on theories on argumentation (Williams and Hazen, 1990) and on the relationship between rhetoric and pluralism (Antczak, 1995).

Most significantly for this project, both authors attempt to be courageous and frank about their own privileged positions in their writing. Each acknowledges his position as a white man—Wendell Berry in The Hidden Wound (1970/1989) and Wayne Booth in his Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (1974)—in his effort to produce

49
accountable white antiracist rhetoric or theorize the means for such a production. Their work also is united by the way in which the Civil Rights movement and campus unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s heightened their sense of their racial location and the need to respond to racial injustice as white people. Given their reputation as prominent ethicists and their increased awareness of racial politics, both The Hidden Wound and Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent hold significant influence over the standards for how people should relate ethically and effectively with one another.

The Hidden Wound is Wendell Berry’s collection of autobiographical essays recalling his boyhood relationship with two black tenant farmers, Nick Watkins and Georgie Ashby. Interspersed with his recollections of growing up as the descendant of Kentucky slave-owning families are Berry’s assessments of racism and interracial relations. According to Berry, the inequities between the races require a back-to-the-land ethic that fosters communal restoration and responsibility. I have found Berry’s apologetic strategies particularly interesting and relevant to my project, for they preserve racial privilege as he promotes his communal land ethic.

Wayne Booth developed the lectures in Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (1974) as an admittedly frustrated
commentary on the crumbling standards of civility. He felt that the turmoil surrounding the Civil Rights struggle and social protest rhetoric undermined the possibility of establishing any reasonable commonplaces across sociopolitical differences. Without commonplaces, he surmised, people could not communicate or build alliances across their differences. Booth therefore sought to theorize a process to develop commonplaces, a process he calls the "rhetoric of assent."

Booth proposes a process where people assent or agree with whatever positions are being espoused in order to generate dialogue. He hopes that assent will counter the effects of dogmatic skepticism, which he holds responsible for the breakdown of commonplaces in public discourse in the 1960s. Recognizing that not all positions are trustworthy, and, therefore, not deserving of automatic assent, Booth introduces the concept of the "qualified knower" to function as a expert guide for uncertain audiences. However, as I argue in Chapter 3, this safeguard reinscribes the communicative tension produced by dogmatic skepticism. Instead of fronting a determined disbelief, audiences now can avoid the need to evaluate different positions by allowing the qualified knower's privileged positions to function as evaluations.
Both case studies provide opportunities to assess the ways in which the rhetoric of two white antiracist men shape what they know and can do as white antiracists. In Chapter four, I examine the rhetoric of womanist scholars and activists who oppose white feminists' racial privilege. As black women, they write about white racial privilege from the outside which, given the normative invisibility of racial privilege for white people, is a valuable offering of insight and criticism.

The nineteen womanist texts I review in Chapter four were written between 1978 and 1994. They consist mostly of personal essays and scholarly articles, although I also include two pertinent poems. Some overlap exists with the literature I surveyed on privilege. My criteria for selecting texts to review consists of the following:

1) the author(s) identified as a black feminist(s) or womanist(s), wrote on racism from an antiracist perspective, and had white feminists in mind as a primary audience.

2) they wrote in the spirit of confrontational alliance; that is, they said what they needed to say about racism to white women but did not dismiss the prospect of continuing a womanist/feminist coalition. Mutual engagement
and compassionate communication remain viable options.

Together, these texts expose many of the presumptions of white privilege that undermine white feminist antiracist theory and practice. They also suggest ways to improve white antiracist rhetoric and practice.

In sum, I approach the work of Berry, Booth, and the womanist writers as models or teachers for my own practice of white antiracism. I find both their successes and their limitations instructive in that they offer an antiracist legacy to draw upon for guidance in working through the epistemological, moral, and relational dimensions of white privilege. Without them, my struggle to be an ethical and effective white antiracist would have lost valuable direction, and frankly, might not have begun at all.

LIMITATIONS

My study is limited in two significant ways. Even though the authors I choose to examine are a "good fit" for the project, usually they do not speak directly to the field of communication scholars or their body of literature. This gap ensures that further research will need to be done to integrate fully this initial exploration and others like it into the communication discipline. Such an integrative effort also will carry the potential to expand and transform
the discipline’s traditional approaches to the study of white racism.

My choice of sources also limits this study in another way. White antiracist rhetoric need not be seen as addressing only the racial tensions between Euro-Americans and African Americans. There is much work to be done on white antiracist responses to racial discrimination against other people of color, both in the United States and internationally. These efforts necessarily entail a more refined mapping of racial discourse and its role in constructing racial identities and privilege/racism. The findings of this study also could be applied to different types of privilege, such as heterosexual privilege, and/or the intersections of privilege.

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

There are five chapters to this study. In Chapter One, I introduce the topic, state the problem, survey the existing literature on privilege, describe my method of analysis and my data, identify its limitations, and reveal its structure. In Chapter Two, I analyze the first of two case studies. Using a genre analysis, I evaluate Wendell Berry’s The Hidden Wound as an apologia for white racial privilege. Elements of this genre also characterize Wayne Booth’s Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent, analyzed in
Chapter Three. In Booth’s rhetorical theory, however, white privilege appears as antisemitism and reinforces a religious racialization that creates a hierarchy of white Christians over white Jews.

I undertake a second literature review in Chapter Four to identify the racism in whiteness from womanist perspectives. I also suggest that white feminists receive and evaluate this information through a compassionate political practice. Chapter Five reiterates the research questions, summarizes the research findings, and elaborates on the role compassion plays in white antiracist rhetoric and practice.
CHAPTER TWO

WHITE ANTIRACIST RHETORIC AS APOLOGIA:
WENDELL BERRY'S THE HIDDEN WOUND

I am born both innocent and accountable.
- Adrienne Rich

What is to be done with the desire for exculpation?
- Barry Lope

As in most other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral predicament of life in a white supremacist society. Under the tutelage of racial privilege, their situation worsens as they grow, for they receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. White children, therefore, become aware of racial tension without understanding their people’s historic role in causing it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it.

Without the content necessary for racial self-reflection, these children become adults, who, if conscientious, most often see their opposition to racism as
a matter of helping people of color to help themselves. Because this focus on helping others emanates from the intersection of conscience and a non-reflexive racial consciousness, it overlooks the need to change white racial privilege even as it brings along a concomitant desire for exculpation. Wishing to be found blameless for racism, even white antiracists may work for justice amid a denial of their own racial defensiveness.

Under these conditions, much white antiracist rhetoric ironically takes the form of an *apologia*, the speech of self-defense. This development is ironic because this ancient genre, evolving as it has over the millennia (Downey, 1993), does not provide an occasion for apology or an opportunity to make amends. Instead, *apologías* equip rhetors with the means for defending their moral character against accusation and attack (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 274). For example, white people often say, “I’m not racist, but . . .” or imply they could not be racist because they are “colorblind” (Houston, 1995; van Dijk, 1992). These elements of an *apologia* allow white rhetors to defer racial accountability by focusing exclusively on people of color or disallowing any focus at all. Either way, the question of white racial privilege never surfaces. When white antiracists adopt racially defensive stances, they, too,
negotiate the tension inherent in opposing racism without changing white privilege. As a result, their antiracist rhetoric functions to defend white people against racist accusations as it preserves white racial privilege.

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which white antiracist rhetoric utilizes the apologia genre and generates unintended racist effects. Specifically, I explore these tensions in Wendell Berry's antiracist autobiography, *The Hidden Wound* (1970). Written in the late 1960s, Berry's work remains an antiracist exemplar in that he focuses on the harm white racism inflicts on both black and white people. Unlike the antiracist apologia that never confronts white people's role as racist oppressors or examines how white rhetoric covers up this "hidden wound" of racism, Berry addresses both. Nevertheless, he still defends himself and his family from racist culpability and the need to change white racial privilege. Therefore, Berry's autobiography presents the white antiracist dilemma that arises from the use of an apologia.

**STANDING BY ANTIRACIST WORDS**

Reviewers of Wendell Berry's voluminous body of work generally overlook *The Hidden Wound* (1970), his recollection of his childhood relationship with two black tenant farmers, Nick Watkins and Georgie Ashby, who lived and worked on the
Berry farm in Kentucky. When critics do mention it, they briefly describe its emphasis on race relations as another example of Berry's extensive humanitarian reach. One of the very few early reviewers even classifies The Hidden Wound as an apologia, although he was not referring to Berry's defense of his family's slave-owning history but to his "attempts to justify his recent retreat to a Kentucky farm" (Callahan, 1971, p. 273). The lack of critical commentary on this significant work on white racism is perplexing, particularly given its timely publication in response to the Civil Rights movement and its reissue at the end of the 1980s, a decade of civil rights travesty.

Perhaps The Hidden Wound is overlooked and misinterpreted because Berry is much more well known for his advocacy of sustainable farming and community economies and the ecospirituality that undergirds his writing, including fiction, poetry, and essays. These themes carry over into his analysis of race relations, as in the conclusion to The Hidden Wound, where he writes, "A true and appropriate answer to our race problem, as to many others, would be a restoration of our communities [which] cannot exclude or mistreat any of its members" (p. 135). Berry's vision of an integrated community and his committed practice of a sustainable land ethic on his own Kentucky farm have earned
him the highest regard from environmentalists, including activists and nature writers. In fact, in an essay written to honor Berry, Terry Tempest Williams proclaims, "Wendell Berry is our nation's conscience" (1991, p. 67).

Berry’s work also merits study by communication ethicists and rhetoricians, for his ecospiritual philosophy and practice are accompanied by a deep appreciation for the ethics of language. In a recent essay in *Argumentation*, William Sullivan invokes Berry’s concept of "standing by words"—which refers to the "accountability of users of language"—as a better "guide for the development of an epistemic and critical rhetoric" than much of the current scholarship in these areas (1995, pp. 59-60). Sullivan’s supposition relies on the three conditions Berry maintains a statement must meet to be considered accountable: 1) a statement must designate its object precisely; 2) its speaker must stand by it: must believe it, be accountable for it, and be willing to act on it; and 3) the relation of speaker, word, and object must be conventional; the community must know what it is (p. 59). In Sullivan’s work, these conditions undergird his socially engaged, pragmatic theory of rhetoric.

Keeping in mind that Berry outlined his theory of language use ten years after he wrote his autobiography, I
also propose to employ Berry’s conditional guideposts to evaluate whether and how he stands by his antiracist words in *The Hidden Wound*. I do this for two reasons, neither of which is to play the critic’s game of “gotcha.” I draw on Berry’s theory of rhetorical accountability because communication scholars, when they deal with race, primarily study the rhetoric of racism. They have yet to attend systematically to white rhetors’ antiracist efforts. Moreover, the lack of scholarly attention to white antiracist rhetoric means no one has evaluated its effectiveness or offered guidelines for doing so. Berry’s theory of rhetorical accountability fills in this gap, just as his focus on the self-inflicted wound of white racism closes a breach in the rhetoric of antiracism. Therefore, I apply the theory in *Standing by Words* (1983) in concert with the communication scholarship on apologia to understand how antiracist rhetoric transforms into a defense of racial privilege.

**TO DESIGNATE AN OBJECT PRECISELY**

The first condition Berry requires in order to stand by one’s words is the ability to designate an object precisely. If language lacks this precision, says Berry, “we cannot mean, or say what we mean, or mean what we say . . . “ (1983, p. 55). When language use degenerates, he argues,
social life also suffers. Communal trust languishes, for "we cannot stand by our words because we cannot utter words that can be stood by" (p. 55). In a direct rebuttal to postmodern discourse theories, Berry objects to a language where "the actions of percentages, large organizations, concepts, historical trends, or the impersonal 'forces' of destiny or evolution" (p. 55) replace personal and communal agency. This substitution—and its familiar status as evidence of nihilism—concerns Berry because it obscures the "accountability of the users of language" (p. 24). In other words, when language use diminishes accountability, the moral integrity of language users—people and communities—vanishes.

To illustrate his point, Berry offers brief passages from Buckminster Fuller's explanation of human evolution and William Faulkner's story, "The Bear" (pp. 55-56). Their varying ability to stand by their words also pertains to the study of white antiracist rhetoric. In the excerpt attributed to Fuller, human development is driven entirely by technological advances. Unsurprisingly, Berry rejects this interpretation for its ahistoricity and its attribution of agency to "impersonal forces" (p. 56). Without the possibility of personal accountability, Fuller's rhetoric of technological determinism, is, according to Berry, nothing
more than “tyrannese” (p. 57). Fuller hides accountability behind technology in a way that closely resembles how white antiracists hide racial privilege within an apologia.

On the other hand, Faulkner is more concerned with ways of becoming accountable. His central character in “The Bear” is a white Mississippian who decides to relinquish the ownership of his land. He does so, in Berry’s words, because he “inherits directly the guilt of the conqueror, [and] the history of expropriation, despoliation, and slavery” (p. 56). Allowing the character, Isaac McCaslin, to give up the land his racist inheritance bestowed upon him is “too simple” (p. 56) a solution for Berry. Yet, unlike Fuller, Berry acknowledges that Faulkner grounds McCaslin’s crisis in “terms of the historical and cultural continuity that produced it” (p. 56). This precision permits Faulkner to confront white readers with an antiracist dilemma. How will, asks Berry, “the atoning and renewing work that each [white] person must do” (p. 57) actually get done? One part of Berry’s answer is that speakers must designate objects precisely in the effort to stand by their words.

At issue in Berry’s insistence on precise language use is the ethical relation between the knower and the known. Speaking broadly, white people living in a white supremacist society do not know people of color precisely because they
have been and continue to be designated as “objects” of white racism. Therefore, a white person who attempts to overcome racist stereotypes and prejudice must contend with a racially based “privilege of unknowing.” According to Sedgwick, who coined the phrase “privilege of unknowing” in her discussion of sexual politics (1988), privileged people maintain their power in large part through manufactured ignorance about the people they oppress and the effects of that oppression. White individuals’ efforts to stand by their antiracist words, then, is complicated profoundly by the anti-epistemic function of most white rhetoric on race relations.

Berry confronts these complications in his own work as he tries to account for the absence of black people in his writing. In the opening sentences of *The Hidden Wound*, he writes:

> It occurs to me that, for a man whose life from the beginning has been conditioned by the lives of black people, I have had surprisingly little to say about them in my other writings. Perhaps this is justifiable—there is certainly no requirement that a writer deal with any particular subject—and yet it has been an avoidance. (p. 3)
When he wrote about black people at all, Berry says, he "was doing little more than putting down a mark, leaving an opening, that I would later have to go back and fill" (p. 3). He relates these insubstantial depictions to his "unwilling[ness] until now to open in myself what I have known all along to be a wound" (p. 3). The "wound" to which Berry refers is his metaphor for the racist damage white people inflict on themselves (p. 4). Other white men, claims Berry, also are unwilling to open this wound. In their determined ignorance, they, too, have "felt little compulsion to acknowledge it or speak of it; [rather] the more painful it has grown the more deeply [they have] hidden it within [themselves]" (p. 4). White men’s (and, I would add, white women’s) common refusal to know themselves as racist comes full circle as they simultaneously refuse to know the people they label as racial others.

Berry inherited this anti-epistemic method of hiding his racism in his rhetoric. The determined ignorance, distorted racial representations, and buried pain he sees in his own writing parallel his family’s way of telling stories about their slave-holding ancestors in both parents’ lineages. “Among these stories,” he writes, “there were a good many memories of slavery, casually told and heard, usually without comment beyond the facts of a narrative” (p. 65)
5). These stories were so devoid of moral assessment (p. 6) that Berry initially considered his family’s slave-owning history as “merely a curious fact” that “prove[d] that I was somehow special, being thus associated with a historical scandal” (p. 6). Although Berry corrects this faulty impression, he faces a much more difficult task in overcoming the racist silences he has absorbed and perpetuated. He has yet to reckon with the ways in which precise silences shape the ability to stand by words just as surely as precise definitions.

THE SPEAKER MUST STAND BY IT

When a racial relation between the knower and the known is immoral and the knower does not admit it—as in the Berry family stories—he or she can misrepresent the relationship to conceal the breach of integrity. To maintain this illusion, white speakers also may draw from a variety of other rhetorical options. They learn, albeit mostly without explicit instruction, numerous discursive strategies to deny, disclaim, and distance themselves from racist accusations and outcomes. To his credit, Berry exposes many of these rhetorical maneuvers in his writing and in his family’s stories. He also uncovers the means by which 19th-century tropes of the gentleman and the soldier romanticized racist violence (pp. 12-15) and how selective sermons
delivered by that era's clergy supported slavery and white superiority (pp. 15-19). The hidden immorality in each of these rhetorical forms lies in their facility to deny responsibility for racism while incessantly urging it on.

Given this pervasive retreat from candor, Berry's second condition of rhetorical accountability requires speakers to stand by their statements in the following ways: they "must believe [their statement], be accountable for it, [and] be willing to act on it" (1983, p. 25). Although this is a demanding requirement, it is partial because it does not attend to speakers' disposition to abide by it. Speakers' inclinations to uphold Berry's condition vary greatly depending on whether they believe themselves to be right or wrong. When speakers believe they are right, they relish the opportunity to account for their statements and are willing to act on them without reservation. But, if they believe themselves to be wrong, they must own up and account for themselves to the satisfaction of those wronged and then accept the consequences of their admission. In the latter case, Berry's condition tests a speaker's integrity to such an extent that the number of actual role models available, particularly in public life, are few and far between. Indeed, the moral limits of the Berry family's storytelling and his own determined ignorance demonstrate
that a willingness to acknowledge and believe in the racist wound hidden in white history, culture, and people is a difficult conviction to come by.

Despite these significant impediments, Berry does acknowledge his racist inheritance. He writes,

"It took me a long time, and in fact a good deal of effort, to finally realize that in owning slaves my ancestors assumed limitations and implicated themselves in troubles that have lived on to afflict me—and I still bear that knowledge with a sort of astonishment." (1970, p.6)

Still, a gap can open in the mind of rhetors between the moment they recognize their racism and the instant when they should account for it. After Berry realizes how his family’s slave-owning past involves him, a chasm opens when he turns to account for it.

When Berry relates the story of his family selling a rebellious slave to a violent slave trader, he “finds it impossible to believe” (p. 7, emphasis added) in his family’s moral culpability. Instead, he tries to absolve them by wishful speculation. He writes, “No one could have wanted any such thing to happen. Far from that, I don’t think they even expected any such thing to happen” (p. 8). In this moment, Berry resists accountability and opts
instead for the obfuscating language of an *apologia*. Although Berry does not justify slavery, unlike many other apologists for slave owners, he seeks to defend the moral character of his family in desperately immoral circumstances.

Berry’s reluctance to concede his family’s complicity may be understood in that they are not alive to speak for themselves and because he is responsible for representing their actions in his readers’ minds. His defense, however, employs the same anti-epistemic moves he has just critiqued, only now he couches them within an exonerating explanation. Berry claims that racism “burdened” his family and estranged them from their conscience. They could not have known the harm they committed because, he writes,

they endeavored to protect themselves by a carefully contrived myth, preserving them against any acknowledgment, spoken or unspoken, of their involvement. I don’t think they expected the slave to be rebellious; I think it is even possible that my great-grandfather did not understand, in any way that he would have acknowledged to himself beforehand, that in selling the slave he abandoned him to violence. (p. 8)
Simply put, the slave owners protect themselves from the injustice of their action through determined ignorance and selective racist fictions.

Berry muddles this clear explanation as he preempts the perception that his family's motives were consciously racist. After conceding his family's contrived ignorance, Berry stifles the racist implications through his own skepticism ("I don't think they expected") and largesse ("I think it is even possible"). He may be right. He also would be unconscionable were he to claim their intent as racist since he cannot retrieve it. Yet, in turning away from the possibility, he tampers with an opportunity for moral reflection and increases the chance his hidden wound will fester. His resistance also attests to the difficulty in meeting his second condition of rhetorical accountability when moral character is at stake. All speakers can ward off the need to account or act for themselves if they simply refuse to believe they have done anything wrong.

In contrast to his skepticism about his family, Berry is certain about the culpability of pro-slavery historians and clergymen of the nineteenth century. Regarding their rhetoric and actions, he declares, "[t]here is no doubt in my mind, that all this moral and verbal obfuscation is intentional [in] its purpose . . . to shelter us from the
moral anguish implicit in our racism" (p. 15). To these historical figures, Berry denies the benefit of the doubt he readily grants his predecessors.

The benefits of Berry’s doubt about his family’s intent also exempt them from responsibility for the effect of their actions. In their stead, Berry surmises that another, more likely villain is responsible for the violence done to the slave. “It seems quite possible,” he conjectures, “that [the slave trader] Bart Jenkins appeared to the household that night, to their astonishment, as the agent of a horror and an outrage that they had inherited and lived with all their lives, and had never openly faced” (p. 8). By negatively depicting the slave trader’s agency and positively representing his family’s passivity, Berry transfers the onus in selling the slave exclusively to the slave trader. In this way, he implicates his ancestors without rendering them accountable for their deeds.

One of the principal ways Berry absolves his ancestors is through special pleading on their behalf. In The Art of Argument, St. Aubryn singles out this fallacy for its role in racist rhetoric (cited in McPhail, 1996, p. 174, n.8). According to Mark McPhail, St. Aubryn “uses the specific example of racial prejudice to exemplify the inconsistencies and absurdities that arise when special pleading is used to
justify privilege gained by applying principles to others differently than they are applied to oneself” (1996, p. 174, n.8, emphasis added). Ironically, special pleading can be used without explicit prejudice in white antiracist rhetoric to justify the privilege of unknowing. In this way, speakers employ the double standard without being held accountable for its racist effect.

Special pleading is one discursive strategy in the apologia genre that rhetors may use to defend their moral character. In a classic exposition on the subject, Ware and Linkugel (1973) designate the central means of moral defense. Rhetors looking to persuade others of their characters’ good standing resort to four “’modes of resolution’” (p. 275). They include denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (p. 275). Rhetors may use these modes in different combinations to produce whatever effects they desire to obtain through their apologia. When rhetors seek absolution, as Berry does for his family and himself (1970, p. 9), they rely principally on denial and differentiation to achieve their goal (Ware and Linkugel, p. 282). I will focus on denial first.

When rhetors attempt to repudiate charges of racism, their denials can take several forms (van Dijk, 1992). In The Hidden Wound, the form of denial that Berry uses most
prominently—admission followed by denial—is rare in *apologia*, according to Teun van Dijk, yet characteristic of antiracist rhetoric (p. 91). This type of denial is uncommon outside antiracist rhetoric because it compels white antiracists to deny convincingly what they previously admitted. Under circumstances like these, the "person who is charged with some despicable action often finds a disclaimer of intent as an attractive means of escaping stigma" (Ware & Linkugel, p. 276). Facing this same bind in his family history, Berry also resorts to denials of intention. The doubt he expresses through his anti-epistemic defense effectively denies any racism on his family's part, for if they could not know the outcome in selling the slave, they could not have intended the racist harm that occurred.

Another option for rhetors' use of the admission/denial combination is to differentiate themselves through what van Dijk calls a "transfer move" (p. 91). Antiracist rhetors typically use this strategy because, after they admit that the group to which they belong is racist, they increase the difficulty of persuading others that they, as individuals, are not. Under this increased burden of proof, many antiracists endeavor to distinguish themselves by shifting blame onto others. Berry exemplifies this move when he
admits that his great-grandfather "abandoned [the slave] to violence" (p. 8), distinguishes him from the more horrifying agency of the slave trader, and then transfers his great-grandfather’s responsibility for violence entirely over to the slave trader.

The most egregious example of scapegoating occurs when Berry compares his great-grandfather’s freedom of choice to that of the slave his great-grandfather sold. The slaveowner, John Johnson Berry, is described by Berry as "a rather mild and gentle man by nature" (p. 7). On account of his character and the close proximity of his neighbors, Berry attests that his forebear was "unwilling . . . to commit personal violence against his slave" (p. 7, emphasis added). In spite of this reluctance, Berry maintains that his great-grandfather was "forced to accept the institutional violence [of slavery] as a sort of refuge" (p. 7, emphasis added). According to Berry, the slave owner sought refuge in selling the slave because

a rebellious and mean [slave] obviously had to be dealt with, and the method of dealing with him had to be violent: the master had either to answer the slave’s violence with greater violence of his own, or to invoke the institutional violence of slavery, selling the slave to someone more able or
willing than himself to enact the necessary cruelty. (pp. 6-7, emphasis added)

The dictates of slavery, Berry holds, left the elder Berry no other choice but to sell the slave.

The imperatives emphasized in these passages disappear in Berry’s depiction of the slave. He writes, “any slave who was unwilling [original emphasis] to be a slave broke through the myth of paternalism and benevolence, and brought down on himself [emphasis added] the violence inherent in the system” (p. 6). According to this explanation, the slave’s “choice” to resist slavery both belies its protective myths and invokes its violence. Because the slave brings “down on himself” the abuse he suffers, even the slave system is merely an accomplice to his willpower. Within this context, the contrast between the willfully rebellious and mean slave and the naturally gentle, helpless slave owner allows Berry to hold even a slave accountable for the slave owner’s actions. In a stunning triple transference, Berry arranges for the slave’s supposed incorrigibility, the slave system’s innate violence and slave trader’s “violence of character” (p. 13) to assume complete culpability. Together, they eliminate even the question of the slave owner’s accountability.
At issue here for contemporary white antiracists is to understand how their rhetoric produces an *apologia* rather than a call for social change. A frank disbelief in one’s racism, such as Berry displays toward his great-grandfather, is not the only source of the unexpected inability to stand by antiracist words. As demonstrated in this analysis of *The Hidden Wound*, the desire for exculpation, concealed in anti-epistemic rhetoric, demands an audience defer accountability. Both these stances breach Berry’s second condition of rhetorical accountability because they obstruct moral and racial self-reflection. Ten years after *The Hidden Wound*, in his critique of the rhetoric of technological determinism, Berry exclaims, “What is remarkable, and frightening, about this language is its inability to admit what it is talking about” (1983, p. 38). The same could be said of white antiracists who deny their own roles in racism.

Even though Berry often can identify racist rhetoric and expresses a sincere commitment to egalitarian race relations, his bottom-line defense of his great-grandfather’s moral character helps the slave owner evade racial responsibility. This flaw in Berry’s storytelling demonstrates that liberal rhetoric and good intentions do not prevent a rhetor from reinscribing deeply entrenched
racist conventions. When Berry turns from telling his ancestor's story toward examining his own racial stance, he, too, recognizes these insufficiencies. He writes:

For a long time after I was grown the question of racism remained passive in me. I subscribed to the principles of political equality and civil rights. I had not knowingly mistreated or insulted any black person because he was black. I hoped, in a general way, that the "race situation" would be solved in a manner that would be acceptable and beneficial to the Negroes. On the other hand, I was not really dealing with the question. I think I lacked any clarifying or critical sense of my own involvement in the problems and the costs of racism. (p. 86)

Berry's attempt to understand his role as a white man living in a racist society produces The Hidden Wound.

Berry's autobiography is limited by the family stories he learned in his Southern childhood. Their one-sided narratives about slavery lacked the content to help him recognize the racist role he inherited. Gone, too, was the moral compass to seek justice. Without context and direction, Berry does not know his racial identity except through the thicket of its racist conventions.
He obscures his search, however, by adopting the imprecise language white Americans use to keep their egalitarian principles and their racist practices as separate as they are contradictory. His refusal to believe in any but scapegoated sources of racism also hinders him. Berry does not deal with the question of racism as he desires because white people’s anti-epistemic rhetoric on race relations hides what they most need to address: the immorality of white racial privilege. This deeply hidden facet of the racist wound scars Berry’s third condition of rhetorical accountability and his depiction of his relations with the black tenant farmers, Nick Watkins and Georgie Ashby.

RELATIONS MUST BE CONVENTIONAL

To be accountable, Berry has maintained thus far, rhetors must know, believe, and act on their statements. His third and final condition of rhetorical accountability requires that the “relation of speaker, word, and object must be conventional; the community must know what it is” (1983, p. 25). For white antiracists, this condition poses significant problems. First, racist rhetoric dominates public discourse in the United States. This domination, while never complete, establishes rhetorical conventions that govern conduct for interracial relationships. The
anti-epistemic maneuvers inherent in these dominant 
conventions allow even antiracist rhetors, like Berry, to 
evade the demand for accountability. Consequently, the 
white community’s conventional response to racism is to seek 
personal exoneration while denying they personally are 
racist.

Berry also knows that an effective and transformative 
antiracist rhetoric does not yet exist in a popularly 
recognized form. In The Hidden Wound, he acknowledges the 
gap in both rhetoric and interracial relationships:

we have not developed the language by which to 
recognize the extent or the implications of the 
[racist] division, and we have not developed 
either the language or the necessary social forms 
by which to recognize across the division our 
common interest and common humanity. (1970, p. 92) 

White antiracist rhetoric, then, fails to meet the third 
condition because white rhetors remain trapped in a 
tautology. Even if they concede racism exists, they resist 
conventions that could account for it, and because they deny 
they are racist, they do not develop accountable 
conventions.

Within these predominantly racist conventions and 
without an antiracist language, Berry attempts to articulate
his relations with Nick Watkins and Georgie Ashby. Under these rhetorical conditions, his reconstruction suffers as he struggles with how little he remembers and how little he ever knew (1970, p. 31). Nevertheless, Berry wants to remember Watkins and Ashby, he says, “in order to to reexamine and to clarify what I know to be a moral resource, a part of the vital and formative legacy of my childhood” (p. 61). Berry also attributes his current opposition to racism to the couple because of his “old sense of allegiance to them” (p. 61). Ultimately, however, his remembrance endlessly circles around the subject with which he must contend but refuses to know: the immorality of his family’s racial privilege.

Again, Berry’s desire to ward off racist accusations and to absolve his Southern white family’s reputation compels him to write an apologetic narrative. Limited now by both defensive and racist rhetorics, Berry struggles to express his antiracist loyalties to Watkins and Ashby. For example, in his depiction of Watkins, Berry both resists and relies upon familiar racist terminology. Rhetorically, he is caught between this “rock and a hard spot” because he desires to protect his family and so must write from within a framework that does not raise questions about their moral complicity. Within these constraints, Berry’s only
alternative is to "elevate" Watkins to the same semantic level occupied by his family and to identify with him there on their racially privileged terms.

This strategy, too, raises tensions of which Berry is aware but does not understand. He attributes them instead to the subjective hazards of memory. He explains,

I am, after all, writing about people of another race and a radically different heritage, whom I knew only as a child, and whose lives parted from mine nearly a quarter of a century ago. As I write I can hardly help but think of the possibility that if Nick and Aunt Georgie were alive to read this, they might not recognize themselves. (1970, p. 48)

From Berry's perspective, the representational risks he incurs are inherent in writing from memory. They are compounded further by what he calls "the extreme racial sensitivity" of the 1960s and his "sense of being doomed by [his] history to be, if not always a racist, then a man always limited by the inheritance of racism" (p. 49). Near despair, Berry interprets this legacy as having "condemned [him] to be always conscious of the necessity not to be a racist, to be always dealing deliberately with the reflexes of racism that are embedded in my mind as deeply as the
language I speak” (p. 49, original emphasis). Finding himself here, in the unconventional struggle between remembering and needing to defend, Berry begins again his pattern of admission and denial.

The majority of his recollections involve Watkins, who moved to the Berrys’ farm when Berry was only three years old. Watkins worked for Berry’s grandfather as a tenant farmer until he died eight years later, in 1945 (p. 23). Berry’s memories, then, come from his very early childhood. Berry again raises his concern about relying solely on boyhood recollections because the distance of his early youth complicates “the dangers and difficulties in a white man’s attempt to write so intimately of the life of a black man” (p. 75). Therefore, Berry concedes, as he does several times and in different ways throughout the text, the limits of his knowledge of Watkins and Ashby. This time he says, “I cannot with any assurance claim to know how Nick was, but only how he appeared to me, what he meant to me” (p. 75).

Berry’s oft-repeated honest admission runs into trouble, though, when he tries to remember Watkins without challenging the morality of the Berry family’s relation to him. As a result, Berry more or less inadvertently describes Watkins in racist terms as he denies their racism. For example, Berry introduces Watkins saying, “White people
thought of Nick as 'a good nigger,' and within the terms of that designation he had lived his life" (p. 23). Berry does not deny the racism in the derogatory label; both the racism he denies and his denial of it are more subtle. Instead of outright repudiation, Berry’s statement begs the question of which white people knew and thought of Watkins through this double-edged praise. They certainly weren’t his previous employers. Berry knew from Watkins that "he had worked for hard bosses," including "a harsh white woman" who would whip him when, as a small boy in her employ, the cow he was milking would kick over the bucket and "he would have to carry it back to the house empty" (p. 23). She would not have praised Watkins, even through an ambivalent epithet.

The people Berry knew who were in a position to know and describe Watkins lived within the young Berry’s immediate circle. One person was his grandfather, who, Berry says, "within the bounds of racial bias, thought highly” of Watkins (p. 23). I do not pinpoint Berry’s grandfather as a speaker who likely uttered the phrase “good nigger” to target a racist and accuse Berry of coddling the family image. More helpful in understanding how antiracism becomes a racist apologia is Berry’s technique of generic attribution to distance his grandfather from a damaging phrase. Though Berry admits his grandfather’s biased view,
this mitigating strategy and others like it affects Berry’s memory of Watkins and the meaning he can make of those memories.

Mitigation strategies are “another form of denial,” according to van Dijk, that include, among others, downtoning, minimizing, or using euphemisms when describing one’s negative actions: [such as] “I did not threaten him, but gave him friendly advice,” [or] “I did not insult her, but told her my honest opinion” . . . . (1992, p. 92)

People mitigate, van Dijk continues, when “the relevant norms are rather strong” (p. 92) and “the concept of racism is (still) largely understood in the classical, ideological sense of seeing other ethnic or racial groups as being inferior, or in overt, official, institutional practices, such as apartheid” (p. 93). Writing The Hidden Wound in the 1960s, where white people’s racism was challenged but their white privilege largely was not, Berry often mitigates to soften recollections that indicate his family might have been or were actively racist.

One of Berry’s particularly problematic memories involves an afternoon visit to Watkins and Ashby’s house. Another small boy was also visiting and “continually on the verge of mischief” (p. 51). To keep him in line, Watkins
repeatedly threatened, "John's going to get you. If you don't quit that, John's going to get you" (p. 51). To young Berry's amazement, he realizes that the menacing "John" is his father. Still stunned by this image, Berry minimizes the part his father could have had in creating that perception. He writes,

In justice to my father, I must say that I don't believe his name was used in this way because of anything he had done, but because of his place in the system . . . . Thus he had entered the formidable role of "boss man": whoever he was, whatever he did, he had the power and the austerity of that role; the society assigned it to him, as it had assigned to Nick the role of "nigger." (p. 51)

Berry's explanation is, in itself, plausible; John Berry need not have been literally terrifying to be used as a disciplinary foil. Yet, Berry's insistent disbelief completely dismisses the possibility his father may have been actively racist as he also minimizes his father's responsibility for passive complicity. In another transfer move, "society" instead becomes responsible.

When Berry resists any negative judgment of his family, he filters memories of both them and Watkins through a line
of apologetic defenses. These defenses narrow the range of interpretations Berry can imagine and tolerate. Suffering most is his truncated depiction of Watkins. Both Berry’s introduction and difficult childhood memory resist remembering Watkins in racist terms, yet they also accept the racist assumption that he lived his life “within” the limits of the role he was assigned (p. 23). This assumption virtually erases Berry’s memories of Watkins “outside the boundaries of his life as a servant” or leaves those memories inexplicable (p. 45). Berry’s antiracist sentiment chafes at this representational confinement but does not substantively alter it.

Instead, the “good nigger” or Sambo trope becomes one of the “building blocks of ‘reality’” (Lubiano, 1992, p. 331) in Berry’s representation of Watkins. Southern slave owners created the Sambo stereotype “to convince themselves as well as the North that slavery was moral” (Takaki, 1979, p. 119). Through it, they imposed onto slaves a mixed bag of characteristics, including “childlike, docile, irresponsible, given to lying and stealing, lazy, affectionate and happy” (Takaki, p. 116). When slave owners wished to shore up, in Berry’s words, the “myths of paternalism and benevolence” (1970, p. 6), they referred to the need to care for Sambo. In this storyline, kindly,
authoritative slave masters and their Sambo slaves play Dr. Jekyll to the brutish violence of the slavetraders' and rebellious slaves' Mr. Hyde.

Berry's antiracist invocation of the Sambo trope in his depiction of Nick Watkins separates the positive traits from the negative and assigns him only the former. For example, Watkins "never [runs] out of patience" (p. 23) with the Berry boys or, at least, says Berry, he "never show[s] it" (p. 24). Most of Berry's boyhood memories surround Watkins in a cluster of affectionate attributes. For Berry, Watkins was "casual and familiar" (p. 38) and possessed of "a simple-hearted generosity" (p. 53). He often had to work as he watched over the young Berry and did so with such constant forebearance that Berry concludes, "I think he found it easy to be solitary and quiet" (p. 28). Given Watkins' "steadiness at work," Berry also determines that "it was clearly Nick who bore the great responsibility" for farming the Berrys' land (p. 24).

In contrast, Berry ascribes a few of Sambo's negative characteristics to his grandfather. For example, his grandfather's "unshakable devotion to the idea that he was still in charge" of the family farm, even though he was physically unable to do the work, leads him to risk his and Watkins' safety on a daily basis, simply to be in the field.
This irresponsible behavior derived from his grandfather’s “childishness,” as Berry calls it, in “absolutely refus[ing] to accept the limits of age” (p. 25). On the strength of a grandson’s convictions, however, Berry carefully clarifies the extent of his grandfather’s excesses. “I don’t think,” avows Berry, my grandfather stayed with [Watkins] to boss him.
I think he stayed so close because he couldn’t stand not to be near what was going on, and because he needed the company of men of his own kind, working men. (p. 24)
This testimony regains the good standing of his grandfather’s character. It also reevaluates Watkins’ hard-working ethos as rightly belonging to men like Berry’s grandfather, as described in the possessive, “his own kind.”

Both Watkins’ good nature and Grandfather Berry’s cantankerousness derive from their loyalty to the Berry family and farm. They cultivated the land together, Berry reports, “with the deep camaraderie of men who have known hard work all their lives” (p. 25). Again, however, Berry undercuts the symmetry he creates between the two men because, he maintains,

[Grandfather] was always, had had to be deeply concerned with the economic and legal abstractions
of landowning. . . . Nick’s economic situation, although much lower in fact and in expectancy than my grandfather’s, was more stable. . . .

[Consequently,] my grandfather went to the field with his mind burdened; when Nick went to the field his mind was free. (pp. 82-83)

Thus defined as poor but free and rich yet burdened, Berry contains, respectively, the idealized Watkins and the hampered grandfather squarely within the conventions of Southern paternalism.

By idealizing Watkins and his role on the family farm, Berry avoids having to justify racism or explain the inequitable relations. After all, he says only positive things about Watkins; he directs his criticism toward his grandfather. Having amply protected his own character, Berry’s idealization “may thus be said to provide a compensation on the symbolic level” (Spurr, 1993, p. 132) for Watkin’s impoverished circumstances and unjust racial status. Even this rhetorical tradeoff carries a hidden cost, however, for its terms of approval are bound by the racially privileged standards of white men. In other words, Berry’s acclaim for Watkins defies racist practice and yet emanates from within a racist rhetorical framework. Berry’s respect for Watkins is based largely on his similarity to
Grandfather Berry and for his service to the entire Berry family. Berry also implicitly praises Watkins for silently enduring his "knowledge that his fate was to do the hardest work for the smallest of wages, and that there was no hope of living any other way" (p. 23). Watkins is symbolically rewarded, then, for being like and maybe even better than white men but staying beneath their power and status.

Idealizing Watkins bolsters both his and Berry's character as Berry identifies with Watkins through the terms of white privilege. These apologetic tactics cannot apply to Berry's depiction of Georgie Ashby, however, for his memories of her clearly recall her opposition to white racism and affirmation of black humanity on their own terms. For example, he remembers her quoting a speaker from the black nationalist Back to Africa movement, who said, "Don't let them tell you they won't know you when you go back. They know their own people and they'll welcome you" (p. 33). Though Berry can recall the line and knows that there "was much of this talk," he "had no context in which to place it and understand it, and so," he says, "I have lost the memory" (p. 33).

Ashby was also Berry's first source regarding "the question of civil rights for Negroes" (p. 34). These conversations, too, are mostly forgotten for lack of a
context. Again, though, Berry recalls “one phrase [that] stuck in [his] mind along with her manner of saying it” (p. 34). Ashby had told him “that many times white people had promised the Negro people ‘a right to the flag,’ and they had never given it to them” (p. 34). According to Berry, he was “deeply disturbed by what she said” and turned to his family to elaborate. Instead of an explanation, he recalls “the indignation of my white elders when I would try to check the point with them” (p. 34). Uncontainable instances like these teach Berry that Ashby’s moral code contradicts his family’s, so he writes about her “with fear that I will misrepresent or underestimate her” (p. 32).

In part, Berry’s fear stems from the privilege of unknowing, that is, how little he knows about Ashby and how this absence of understanding affects the little he can recall. Yet, he also says,

her manner would impose a curious self-consciousness on [his brother and him]—not a racial self-consciousness, but the demanding self-consciousness of a child who has been made, in the fullest sense, the guest of an adult, and of whom therefore a dignity is expected. (p. 31)
Although Berry denies the intersection of conscience and racial self-consciousness here, he clearly links the two together later. He writes,

After Aunt Georgie moved away it was probably ten years before I paid attention to any more talk about civil rights, and it was longer than that before I felt again anything like the same disturbed sense of personal responsibility that she made me feel. (p. 34)

Because Berry lacks the relational conventions to understand Ashby and because so much of his account comes from a position of defensiveness, he cannot fulfill the third condition of rhetorical accountability that the "relation of speaker, word and object must be conventional; the community must know what it is" (1983, p. 25). In other words, despite his best intentions, Berry remains trapped within the hidden tautology of a defensive antiracist rhetoric: he admits that racism exists but defends against conventions that might account for it; therefore, he cannot stand by the words he uses to describe Watkins and Ashby. As a result, for white antiracist rhetors, he leaves unanswered the question of how to move from admission to accountability.
CONCLUSION

As the preceding discussion illustrates, there are two central reasons why white antiracist rhetoric often functions as a racist defense. The first is that white privilege continues to operate as presumption for antiracist rhetors. The potential for this seeming paradox derives in part from the nature of presumption, which is, according to Douglas Walton, "a speech act halfway between assertion and assumption" (1995, p. 133). Obviously, antiracist rhetors do not want to assert white privilege and could not do so legitimately in a society that purports to be egalitarian. Nevertheless, they still unwittingly assume it in their rhetorical stance. They do so because, like Berry, their rhetoric continues to operate from within a racist framework. Only this racism more effectively functions "as a strategy for the maintenance of privilege than [for] prejudice" (Wellman, 1993, p. 60). In short, antiracist rhetors who oppose prejudiced stereotypes still can be racist in their implicit defense of whiteness as a normative ideal.

The veiled assumptive presence of racial privilege also is reinforced also by the presumptive reasoning process. By "revers[ing] the roles of the proponent and respondent in dialogue" (Walton, p. 133), presumptive reasoning deflects
the responsibility of white rhetors to explain or justify racial privilege. Instead, the burden of proof shifts onto people oppressed by racism, and, in effect, requires them to educate their oppressors. The difficulty in doing so can be surmised from Berry’s confused responses to Ashby’s perspectives on civil rights and black nationalism. Without a context for an antiracist education, white rhetors continue to support egalitarian values while protecting racial privilege.

Many white rhetors try to resolve their moral dilemma through relatively sincere denials of privilege and a variety of transfer moves that displace responsibility for racism. Although these anti-epistemic strategies guard reputations, they also contribute to the second reason that white antiracist rhetoric remains undesirably defensive: it lacks a language of accountability. White antiracist rhetors do not develop conventions to account for racism or racial privilege because the denials and displacements they use prevent their recognition of the need to account. Examples abound in Berry’s antiracist rhetoric as he struggles to articulate Watkin’s difference from racist stereotypes in terms of his similarity to privileged white norms. Alternating between racist and racially defensive rhetorics, Berry circumvents the need to account for either.
These convolutions damage both the clarity and effectiveness of white antiracist rhetoric. When white rhetors remain inarticulate about their own racial privilege, they are unable to answer racist charges or accept consequences with integrity. Moreover, because of their privileged ignorance, they are unaware of their abuse of power, which allows them special access to cultural authority and material resources. As a result, white antiracists, in their work to bring about racial justice, reinscribe the racist imbalance of power that they oppose. Obviously, then, their attempts to theorize antiracist rhetorical strategies, such as Berry’s concept of “standing by words,” fail to find any effective words because of this accountability conundrum in antiracist practice.

Accountability is made all the more difficult to resolve by the way in which white people typically construe responsibility as the ability to control. This connotation is found in the racial apologia of everyday conversations. For example, many white people defend against racist accusations through statements such as, “We can’t be held responsible for slavery or segregation; that was in the past,” or “people are naturally prejudiced; that’s just the way it is.” Both positions imply that because the speaker cannot control history or “human nature,” contemporary
racism, too, is beyond control. Another option white rhetors increasingly exploit is the claim that they are the ones actually being controlled. Once again, white rhetors invoke the privilege of unknowing toward their overadvantaged racial status and displace responsibility onto those whom they oppress, this time through the rhetoric of reverse discrimination. These transfer moves parallel Berry's insistence that someone else—the slave system, slave traders, or even the slave—was in control and, therefore, responsible.

When people equate responsibility with control, says Sharon Welch, they are operating from "the assumption that it is possible to guarantee the efficacy of one's actions" (1990, p. 23). They then understand responsibility as the capacity to maintain control over the outcome of their efforts and, necessarily, over the efforts of others. When such a guarantee seems unlikely, they regard any attempt at control as impossible. This fallback position affects conversations about race relations in a roundabout way, such as when white people aver, "we are all just individuals" or "everyone has his or her own opinion." Both pronouncements prevent racial accountability by insisting upon an all-or-nothing arrangement of social power: if racial equality does not exist already in a white "melting pot" society,
then radical individualism dismisses any compunction toward racial reciprocity.

To move from admission to accountability, white antiracists need to become aware of how their presumption of white privilege turns their calls for social change into racist *apologias*. In part, they must understand how they defend their racial privilege. In a tripartite rhetorical move, white rhetors hide white privilege even from themselves, project the burden of disclosure onto the oppressed, and legitimate the "either-you-can-or-you-can't" logic of control. In addition to understanding how they fluctuate between racist and racially defensive rhetorics, white antiracists also must develop a language of accountability that does not instill the capacity to dominate as a virtue. Such a development requires the moral fortitude to interact in a subject-to-subject relationship, without managing the repercussions and controlling the means of relating, particularly when one's character is at stake. These coping strategies only reinscribe dominance and perpetuate the problems they were invoked to avoid.

In sum, for white antiracists to be more effective and accountable, they must reconfigure the relationship between the knower and the known that prevents them from standing by their words. To do this, they must change themselves and
their rhetoric from its unethical and untenable one-sided relation, where racially privileged knowers do all the knowing and little of it well, to an interracial relationship where people both know and learn. Wendell Berry encourages such a rhetorical change, saying that "love makes language exact, because one loves only what one knows" (1983, p. 61). White antiracists would do well to balance Berry’s words by allowing themselves also to be aware of how others know and feel about them. This balance is important to maintain because, as James Baldwin said, “[I]f I am not what I’ve been told I am, then it means that you’re not what you thought you were either!” (1964/1985, p. 329). To sustain an effective antiracist practice, white people must learn and know why to choose accountability and not apologia.
CHAPTER THREE

WHITE PRIVILEGE AS ANTISEMITISM IN WAYNE BOOTH’S RHETORIC OF ASSENT

Privilege is a very tricky thing.

—Naomi Scheman

Thus far I have explored white racial privilege and its negative effects on interracial relationships. In this chapter, I change the focus somewhat to explore the antisemitic aspect of privilege’s “tricky” nature that wreaks havoc among white people. While antisemitism usually is understood as religious discrimination, antisemites often have relied upon white racism as a means of oppressing Jews. The antisemitic method of ensuring racial privilege comes under scrutiny in Wayne Booth’s *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974).

To analyze antisemitism as a method white gentiles use to enforce their racial privilege, several theoretical bridges need to be built. I propose three connections: 1) antisemitism and racism; 2) antisemitism and the changing definition of whiteness; and 3) antisemitism as a racist...
defense of white gentile privilege. These connections demonstrate how antisemitism undermines white antiracist rhetoric. They also are integral to my argument that Wayne Booth’s rhetoric of assent—a rhetorical theory with implicit antiracist potential—functions to preserve an antisemitic white racial privilege.

After establishing the theoretical linkages, I specifically address antisemitism in Booth’s rhetoric of assent. Of particular concern are the epistemological and ethical issues raised by Booth’s theory and his application of it to his depiction of the Jews’ initial disbelief in the Nazi atrocity stories. These issues seriously affect the usefulness of the rhetoric of assent for white antiracists. The hazards brought to light by Booth’s apparently sincere but flawed rhetorical proposal lead white antiracists to the necessity of considering the interdependent concepts of power, process, and position in their own rhetoric and social change efforts.

ANTISEMITISM AND RACISM

American Jews have a very difficult time getting the antiracist community to address antisemitism. The entrenched opposition is based largely on one insurmountable “fact”: Jews are white. This seemingly uncontestable assertion creates a paradox for antiracists in that their
cause challenges white racism, not racism against white people. As a result, Jewish claims of racial injustice are trapped in the intersections of antiracist definitions of race and racism that focus exclusively on people of color. Not only do these definitions erase antisemitism, but they also equate race and racism with people of color, who then must assume primary responsibility for ending racist injustice. This flawed antiracist dynamic also pits Jewish and black people against each other and perpetuates the highly publicized tensions between the two (presumably distinct) groups.

Significantly, in the midst of these fractious effects, white gentiles continue to occupy their whiteness as a normative ideal. This position of power enables them to appear to remain above the fray as they decide whether to address antisemitism as a method of enforcing white gentile privilege. White gentiles who wish to be effective antiracists cannot participate in this privileged racial dynamic. They must explore the ways in which white gentiles repeatedly manipulate the meaning of whiteness to protect their racial privilege at the expense of both Jews and people of color.

First and most pragmatically, white gentile antiracists need to know that not all Jews are white. In a recent
article, "Within and Without: Antisemitism in the Anti-racist Context" (1994), Sandra Haar and Susan Nosov explain that three groups of Jews inhabit the Americas: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrachi. Each group comes from different parts of the world and maintains its own specific cultural traditions. According to Haar and Nosov:

Ashkenazi Jews trace their ancestry to fifteenth century German and sixteenth century Eastern Europe; Sephardi Jews, to Spain before the Inquisition and Expulsion (1492). Following the Spanish Expulsion, Sephardim settled predominantly in North Africa and the Middle East. Jews who are neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi, most often Arab Jews, have sometimes used the term "Mizrachi," meaning "of the East." These distinctions are never precise, particularly with the intermixing of Spanish, Arab and Asian Jews in Africa and the Middle East after the Spanish Expulsion. Other communities, in for example India and Ethiopia, have their own specific designations. (p. 113, n.2)

Jewish racial diversity still may not compel white gentiles to take on antisemitism because, they would say, most Jews
in America are Ashkenazi, and Ashkenazi Jews are white. Haar and Nosov also dispute this perception (p. 111).

Although knowing that Jews can be white or people of color corrects misinformation about Jewish racial homogeneity, it does not address directly the connection between antisemitism and racism. To do this, antiracists must reexamine their definitions of race and racism. For example, David Wellman suggests that racism is "more effectively analyzed as a strategy for the maintenance of [white] privilege than as prejudice" (1993, p. 60). Similarly, antisemitism also may be understood as protecting Christian dominance. Neither definition discounts the harmful effects of prejudice. They point instead to the cause of racism and antisemitism's persistence, even among white gentiles who oppose both. To understand how racism and antisemitism combine to protect white gentile privilege, antiracists need to study how white gentiles continually reconceptualize the definition of whiteness to their advantage.

ANTISEMITISM AND THE CHANGING DEFINITION OF WHITENESS

In this second theoretical bridge, I hope to show how antisemitism expresses intragroup racism by equating white privilege with white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. To make this connection, I draw on two underdeveloped areas of
scholarship: the historical construction of whiteness in the United States and the largely untold story of American Jews as “the not-yet-white ethnics” (Bukowczyk, quoted in Roediger, 1993, p. 184). Even a brief survey of these two areas illustrates that whiteness is an identity whose privileges can be bestowed or revoked.

Although most white people currently take being “white” for granted and defend their racial status as an idealized norm, the concept of whiteness has a history. According to Annlouise Keating, white developed as a racial category only after Europeans colonized “the new world” and institutionalized slavery (1995, p. 912). Before that, she explains, “Puritans and other early European colonizers didn’t consider themselves ‘white’; they identified as ‘Christian,’ ‘English,’ or ‘free’” (p. 912). The colonizers created the extremely loose racial designations of “white” and “black,” she argues, because political and economic desires motivated them to unite and justify slavery (p. 912).

Ronald Takaki supplements Keating’s argument about the history of racialization. He contends that “religion [also] served to identify different racial groups,” for the “English colonizers viewed themselves as Christians and the Africans as heathens” (1993, p. 59). This religious
distinction faltered, however, as Africans began converting to Christianity. The colonists were so determined to maintain their dominant status that they passed laws “that separated race from religion” (Takaki, p. 59) and made the justification of slavery exclusively racial. Nevertheless, their initial definition established an ideological precedent in conflating race and religion to sustain white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) privilege.

Descendants of the colonists continued to manipulate racial definitions to their advantage. These distortions ranged from the notorious constitutional definition of black people as “three-fifths” of a white person to the convoluted enforcement of the “one-drop” rule, where the perception of any African heritage defined a person as black and, at best, a second-class citizen. Over time, both white and black people modified these deeply racist racial designations. The many transformations of black identity—“‘Colored,’ ‘Negro,’ ‘black,’ ‘Afro-American,’ ‘African-American’ (hyphenated) and ‘African American’ (unhyphenated)” (Keating, 1995, p. 912)—are well known in American public discourse. Much less common, however, is public awareness of the related changes in definitions of whiteness.

Keating provides some context for the changing perimeters of whiteness:
Although the term “white”—which was used since the late seventeenth century to designate an elite group of people—seems more stable, its meaning has undergone significant changes. Many people today considered “white”—southern Europeans, light-skinned Jews, the Irish, and Catholics of European descent, for example—were most definitely not “white” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (1995, p. 912)

The changing definitions of whiteness, although related to transformations of blackness and the identities of other people of color, revolve most centrally around the politics of immigration. Legislation regulating immigration, says David Roediger, “often turned on the question, ‘Who was white?’” (1993, p. 182)?

Whiteness became a standard for citizenship when Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790. This law decreed that only the “'worthy part of mankind' would be encouraged to settle in the new republic and be eligible for citizenship” (Takaki, 1993, pp. 79-80). To be considered worthy, immigrants had to live in the country for two years, display a good character in court, and be uncontrovertially “white” (Takaki, p. 80). Thus, Congress and the courts conflated integrity and whiteness in democratic ideology.
The nation's first naturalization law remained in effect for nearly 200 years, until 1952, when Congress "nullified the racial restriction" (Takaki, p. 400).

By this time, however, white gentiles had managed the influx of "worthy" immigrants sufficiently to create a class of people whom historians now regard as the "not-yet-white ethnic" (Bukowczyk, cited in Roediger, 1993, p. 184). Nativists subjected Irish, Italian, Hungarian, and Jewish immigrants to these racial manipulations (Roediger, 1993, p. 184). Initially, however, nativist Americans did not grant the immigrants even this qualified white status; instead, they classified the immigrants as nonwhite or "of debatable racial heritage" (Roediger, p. 184). White ethnic, then, was an identity they had to earn.

The material benefits and cultural authority claimed by WASP citizens enabled their rise to dominance over the indigenous population, slaves, and other immigrants. Racial privilege, then, represented a means of survival and success in the stratified "New World." Nativist WASPs endeavored to protect their power by making the immigrants' struggle to become "white" very difficult.

Jewish people of different nationalities received different receptions from nativists according to the numbers in which they immigrated and their success at assimilating
into normative white Christian culture. For example, German Jews were met with general approval but Russian and Eastern European Jews were disdained. White gentiles harassed the Russian and Eastern European Jews—who immigrated after the German Jews and came in larger numbers—by describing them publicly as “filthy” and “greedy” (Takaki, p. 307) and equating them with black people whom nativists obviously despised (Roediger, p. 184).

Eventually, white gentiles subjected the entire Jewish community to antisemitic racial stereotyping. Roediger writes that “stock anti-Black humor was pressed into service as anti-Semitic, anti-Czech, and, later, anti-Polish humor” (p. 184). Congressional legislators, too, retaliated against Jewish people’s success in fulfilling the American dream, particularly in business and academia. By mixing racist and antisemitic sentiment in their nativist rhetoric, Congress passed a law that imposed severe quotas on immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (Takaki, p. 307).

The history of Jewish immigration illustrates white gentiles’ ability to bestow or revoke the privileged status of whiteness through social, political, and legal means. They also maintained their dominance through illegal means, particularly through the antisemitic activities of white
supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Contemporary white supremacists and modern-day nativists (like Pat Buchanan and his followers) continue to infuse their antisemitism with white racism. This ideological combination preserves the WASP image as quintessentially American and, according to Jewish activist Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, it also protects Christian wealth (1992, p. 121).

In her essay, "Jews, Class, Color and the Cost of Whiteness" (1992), Kaye/Kantrowitz argues that U. S. capitalism further complicates the historically complex relationship between antisemitism and white racism. Like the nativist Congress of the 1920s, many white gentiles currently resent Jewish people's relative financial success. This resentment drives most of the classist arguments to keep antisemitism from becoming a legitimate antiracist issue. "[T]he difficulty some people have in grasping anti-Semitism as a serious concern and as a form of racism," Kaye/Kantrowitz explains, "is that it hasn't kept Jews poor" (p. 142). Indeed, white gentiles bypass the opportunity to celebrate their bootstrap myth of prosperity. They opt instead to turn the Jewish success story into the antisemitic claim "that all Jews are rich" (p. 142). This and other hyper-visible stereotypes, such as the Jewish
American Princess, allow white gentiles to scapegoat Jews for “the abuses of capitalism” (p. 147). Thus, the “illusory protection of ‘whiteness’” (p. 145) bestowed upon Jews does not prevent white gentiles from holding them disproportionately responsible for class exploitation. It does, however, obstruct antiracists from analyzing antisemitism as a racist ploy to protect WASP wealth.

The authors of three recent articles join Kaye/Kantrowitz in her analysis on antisemitism and racism (Reed, 1994; Gershbain and Rubin, 1994; Haar and Nosov, 1994). Like Kaye/Kantrowitz, these five authors conclude that antiracists dismiss antisemitism because of the popular perception of Jews as economically, educationally, and racially privileged. Gershbain and Rubin also argue that antiracists resist opposing antisemitism because they perceive Jews to be a religious minority rather than a racially oppressed group (1994, p. 58), assessments that gain additional credence because many American Jews share them. But Haar and Nosov contend that both white gentile and Jewish antiracists overlook how Jews are oppressed “within a structure of white domination, commonly referred to as antisemitism” (p. 112, emphasis added). In short, antisemitism functions as white intra-group racism that racializes Jews as the not-yet-white ethnic.
Another significant indicator that white gentiles racialize their antisemitism is the practice of singling out physical characteristics—such as noses and craniums—as exclusively Jewish (Gershbain and Rubin, p. 58; Gilman, 1994, pp. 45-47; Kaye/Kantrowitz, p. 81). This rhetoric differentiates Jews from gentiles in a racial hierarchy yet contains enough ambivalence to allow Jews to pass as gentile and assimilate into the dominant culture (Gershbain and Rubin, p. 59; Kaye/Kantrowitz, p. 146). The "melting pot" racial theory also serves as a justification for dismissing antisemitism. White gentile antiracists therefore may concede that Jews have been racialized but persist in their objections to opposing antisemitism as an antiracist issue. Kaye/Kantrowitz sums up their three main reservations thus:

--that Jews, in a burst of victim-competition, will deny both responsibility for racism and privileges derived from it;
--that Jews will take up too much of the still inadequate space/resources only recently available to people of color;
--that recognizing Jewishness as a peoplehood will mean somehow legitimating Jewish national aspiration [and their roles as oppressors of Palestinians]. (1992, p. 119)
Finally, she adds, because gentiles perceive Jews as rich, they dismiss their concerns about antisemitic racism as a "trivial" exasperation of "overprivileged whiners" (p. 120). Faced with the no-win situation of not being "white" enough and yet having their relative success attributed to their whiteness, American Jews may feel they must resort to the history of the Holocaust to make the case that antisemitism is white intragroup racism.

ANTISEMITISM AND WHITE ANTIRACIST RHETORIC

The Nazis' racialization of Jews as non-Aryan in the years preceding and during World War II is recognized by all but the revisionist fringe (Mosse, 1978; Bridenthal, Grossman, and Kaplan, 1984). Invoking this history may be seen as playing a "race card," but Kaye/Kantrowitz refutes the insinuation that the Holocaust absolves Jews of all criticism. Jews must be held "accountable for our actions," she says, but she also implores others "not to scapegoat us for the crimes of capitalism and racism" (1992, p. 128). Despite her plea, the line between accountability and scapegoating wavers constantly in white gentile antiracist rhetoric. This tension produces ethical and epistemological concerns for white gentiles trying to articulate an effective antiracist rhetorical theory. A case in point is Wayne Booth's rhetoric of assent.
In 1971, Booth delivered a series of lectures at the University of Notre Dame that he revised and published as *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974). Critics have given this text considerable scholarly attention for its pluralist appeal to dialogue in a time of racial and political strife and Booth's widespread reputation as a literary and rhetorical critic specializing in ethics. Perhaps the desire for scholarly guidance in resolving entrenched conflict and the respect generally accorded Booth's work contribute to critics overlooking the blatant antisemitism in his dialogic exemplar. Their silence on this issue creates two tasks in building the last theoretical bridge linking antisemitism and white antiracist rhetoric: to demonstrate both the antiracist potential and the limits of a rhetoric of assent.

Booth developed his rhetorical theory in response to the fractious public discourse of the 1960s. To illustrate the debilitated state of communication at this time, he describes his experience of being singled out for personal attack by student graffiti in a campus protest. "It made me angry," he says, as he goes on to criticize the student protestors (p. 9). Denouncing the conflict as "disastrous," Booth next heads for the rhetorical high ground. "I should like to concentrate," he says, "on the verbal and
intellectual failures" (p. 10) of the campus protest, and so he zeroes in on "the impoverished notions of rhetoric [that] greatly contributed to our disaster" (p. 10). Concerned that people just repeatedly assert themselves to "win" an argument, Booth proposes "a view of rhetoric as the whole art of discovering and sharing warrantable assertion" (p. 11). In this spirit of finding meaningful and mutual affirmation, Booth promotes a rhetoric of assent.

The antiracist potential of a rhetoric of assent is evident in Booth's desire to encourage dialogue among people holding incommensurate positions, as is typical of many interracial exchanges. To converse together, Booth urges people to overcome the rationalist imperative to doubt any utterance until provided with irrefutable reasons to believe. Systematic doubt in each other's credibility and veracity, he declares, has led to a "world of futile babblers" whose "passionate commitment has lost its connection with the provision of good reason" (p. xi). This degradation of public discourse also is potentially violent in that it leaves people without any means to resolve their conflicts except to "lay [their] bod[ies] on the line" (p. 85). The relevance of Booth's assessment cannot escape antiracists who, both in the 1960s and the 1990s, have witnessed polarized racial relations escalate into violence.
To overcome polarized positions, says Booth, audiences should abandon doubt and assent to "every belief that can pass two tests: you have no particular, concrete grounds to doubt it . . . and you have good reason to think all men who understand the problem share your belief" (p. 40). For Booth, these two criteria overcome what he calls "negative credulity," or the insistence on disbelieving a claim until one can be absolutely certain of its veracity. He supports his proposal by describing America's widespread disbelief in the early accounts of the Nazis' campaign against the Jews:

I can remember how doggedly, during the years just preceding World War II, I held to my "critical" refusal to believe the atrocity stories about the Nazis. I had been taught that Americans had been gullible in World War I when they believed atrocity propaganda about the Allies. I knew better than to believe that the Nazis were persecuting Jews, and I also knew better than to believe the stories about the purges committed by Stalin: everybody who had a "critical mind" knew that the press was procapitalist and anticommunist and that therefore you couldn't believe those stories. But of course I have now decided, like
you, for good reasons or bad, that in essence those stories were true. (p. 6)

If people had assented to the Nazi atrocity stories, he suggests, they could have avoided a terrible mistake.

Ironically, Booth's recollection does not meet the criteria warranting assent. First, he provides "particular, concrete grounds" to doubt the atrocity stories: America's previous gullibility and the well-known biases of the press. These social assessments also give Booth "good reason" to think informed others shared his doubt. Having met both tests, American skepticism would not have been appeased by the rhetoric of assent, nor would it have helped the Jews.

This exemplar makes evident the rhetorical limits of assent for white antiracists. Since white people—whether or not they perceive themselves to be racist—have a flexible repertoire of beliefs to offer concrete grounds to support racial privilege and the power to promulgate these beliefs as good reasons, they would be assenting to an already racist subjectivity. White antiracists, too, participate in and are subject to these racist ideologies.

Booth further complicates his rhetorical theory by trying to exonerate his own "'critical' refusal" to believe in the atrocity stories. Like Wendell Berry's antiracist memoir analyzed in chapter three, Booth seeks to explain his
disbelief and minimize any negative repercussions by formulating his exemplar with an apologia as a subtext. Of the many strategies apologists may choose, they often use the explanatory address to, in Booth’s terms, gain assent and ward off negative judgments. They hope that “if the audience understands [their] motives, actions, beliefs, or whatever, they will be unable to condemn” the speaker (Ware and Linkugel, 1974, p. 283).

Booth follows suit when he says, “I have now decided, like you, for good reasons or bad, that in essence those stories were true” (p. 6, emphasis added). Here he crafts the “understanding” that his audience identifies with his disbelief and thus, not wanting to evaluate themselves harshly, will not attack Booth for his skepticism. Booth’s inclusionary tactic implicates his audience in the wartime mistake of systematic doubt, although the majority of students listening to him were born after World War II.

Continuing his lecture, Booth widens the circle of disbelievers beyond his audience. He says, “Presumably many a Jew inside Nazi Germany committed the same error of what might be called negative credulity, refusing, with fatal ‘tough mindedness,’ to believe the rumors about the truth that came his way” (p. 6). This second incrimination makes practically impossible his audience’s condemnation of Booth
or themselves for a disbelief that Jews themselves purportedly held. Instead, now that they are guilty, too, Booth can align his own mistaken skepticism with that of the Holocaust victims, appease his conscience, and restore his reputation. Booth, like Berry, accomplishes this apologetic feat through rhetorical “transfer moves” that disperse his personal responsibility and excuse his actions.

Booth’s charge of “negative credulity” against the Jews assumes ideal circumstances under which one could rationally choose to believe or disbelieve in the atrocity stories. While Booth is correct in saying that some German Jews initially did not believe the Nazis would harm them, they did not choose to disbelieve solely out of dogged skepticism. The Nazis encouraged their disbelief through propaganda aimed at reassuring the Jews despite the increasing numbers of antisemitic restrictions and escalating violence.

For example, the Nazis forced Jewish prisoners in concentration camps to write their families and say “that they were safe and that their living and working conditions were tolerable” (Fogelman, 1994, p. 44). The Nazis also solicited letters from the families but did not deliver them to the prisoners. This deception was one small part of an extensive public relations campaign that hid the Nazis’ genocidal intent even as they fueled antisemitic sentiment.
Under wartime circumstances where subterfuge was common and propaganda a strategic tactic, German Jews could not be said to have stubbornly refused to believe in the atrocity stories, as Booth suggests. Indeed, Fogelman states that the "Nazis' determination to murder all Jews was never a matter of public knowledge, much less of public record" (p. 45). That many Jews discerned the threat anyway and acted immediately, then, must be commended. In fact, "sixty thousand emigrated during the first two years of the Nationalist Socialist Party's regime" (Fogelman, p. 27), yet, as the numbers of wartime refugees grew, countries began to restrict immigration severely and even to close their borders entirely. With nowhere to escape to, doubt or assent becomes irrelevant: Jews were trapped in Nazi Germany.

What Booth accomplishes, then, when he attributes Jewish reluctance to "fatal 'tough-mindedness'" is to contrast his own good reasons to disbelieve from their stubborn refusal. This differentiation allows Booth to identify with the Jews and yet blame them despite their status as victims of the war, a strategy many non-Jewish German parents use with their children when they ask about Germany's past. One recent study, for example, found:
Many parents stressed the first perspective on the past—the one which emphasizes the larger-than-life events—at the expense of the second perspective, which highlights personal responsibility. These parents emotionally painted themselves as bearers of the suffering of the Nazi time, as the playthings of uncontrollable social, political, and military events . . . . As victims of larger-than-life events, their share of misery and suffering had fallen to them, just as it had to other victims—the Jews, for instance.

(Stierlin, 1993, p. 151)

By transferring all personal responsibility to the political fates, German gentiles assume they occupy a subject position similar to the Jews. By their logic, “questions about accountability and historical justice could thus (seemingly) be answered and avoided simultaneously” (Stierlin, p. 151, emphasis added). Like Booth, German gentiles could explain away their responsibility by identifying as victims—just like the Jews—and then differentiate themselves by holding Jews to a higher standard.

This “redistribution of responsibility” effectively denies racism (van Dijk, 1992, p. 107) through transfer moves that are characteristic also of presumptive reasoning.
In fact, one critic claims that “the real issue [in the rhetoric of assent] is one of presumption” (Brinton, 1995, p. 259), although he does not offer a critical reading of the presumptive reasoning process in Booth’s rhetorical theory. Presumptive reasoning allows for evasions of responsibility because Booth requires audiences to assent to a presumption—no matter the deceptive circumstances—while they endeavor to prove or disprove a speaker’s claim.

If this “thought knot” was not enough, Booth also insists that credence be given to communal norms (p. 100). This additional imperative severely hampers Jews who are asked to assent to the antisemitic norms of Nazis, for their power polices the national community in which the Jews live. It also impinges upon antiracist rhetors in the United States who may be unaware that racist norms often sustain white privilege invisibly. In other words, despite a commitment to racial justice, the weight of these four factors—presumption, assent, norms, and invisibility—virtually ensures that racist rhetoric will prevail even in antiracist theory and practice. Their combination stacks the deck so heavily in favor of the status quo that opposition has folded their hand, to continue the metaphor, most likely without even realizing it.
The problem with a rhetoric of assent does not stem specifically from presumptive reasoning or communal norms but rather from how Booth sanctions both without addressing their political context. As I have just shown, assenting to presumptions that reflect antisemitic norms creates an unlivable burden of proof for Jews, yet Booth assumes that both Nazis and Jews converse with equal credibility and equal access to information. Clearly, they did not.

German Jews could not, as Booth suggests, "find some way to rely on. . .common sense—what we ‘sense’ and know in common—[to] trust whatever standards of validation our reasonings together lead us to" (p. 100). In fact, he has already criticized the Jews for using the same common sense that people throughout the world used to doubt the Nazi genocidal plan. Ironically, much of this disbelief prevailed because different national governments did not or would not believe that the Nazis would violate global norms to this extreme degree.

As a result of these internal contradictions in Booth’s theorizing, Jews face a no-win rhetorical situation. Whether they are in Nazi Germany or contemporary America, they are pressured to assent to antisemitic norms or they are castigated for challenging community standards. This double bind persists because Booth does not account for the
transformation of communal norms into a hegemonic consensus, as the Nazis accomplished with their antisemitic propaganda. He overlooks how white supremacist beliefs can dictate the contents of common sense in a racially stratified society.

For example, in 1927, the United States Supreme Court denied naturalization to an Asian Indian immigrant because the justices ruled that "the common man" knew the petitioner was not white. As a result, over the next four years, "sixty-five Asian Indians suffered denaturalization . . . . Lower courts had naturalized them as white immigrants, but under the test of 'common understanding' they had become nonwhite" (Roediger, 1993, p. 182). In these racist cases, Booth's rhetorical theory begs the question, "to what widely recognized belief might these immigrants assent that would support their goal for citizenship?"

In the same era as the Supreme Court decision, American gentiles used white supremacist standards to attack Jewish college students. Decrying Jewish academic success, gentiles charged Jews with being "an unassimilable race, as dangerous to a college as indigestible food to man" (quoted in Takaki, 1993, p. 305). White students also complained that the Jews' ostensible ability to memorize kept "the average of scholarship so high that others with a degree of common sense, but less parrot-knowledge, are prevented from
attaining a representative grade" (quoted in Takaki, 1993, p. 305).

White gentiles had little trouble finding support for their contentions, for they need only claim that their situation is normative and that Jews behave aberrantly. As a result, white gentiles did not have to account for their own academic performance as the burden of proof shifted disproportionately to the Jewish students. Antisemitic arguments like these demonstrate that "truth and common sense are closely related notions in [racist] attacks, and reflect the power of consensus" (van Dijk, 1992, p. 105).

To require assent to these arguments prior to any critical assessment of them is to reinscribe the antisemitic, racist status quo.

Booth’s theoretical thicket grows yet ever more dense as he intertwines two more required concepts—qualified knowers and motivism—into the rhetoric of assent. Rhetors become entangled in the presumption given a qualified knower’s authority to establish communal norms and the threat that a charge of motivism (Booth’s term for a hidden motive) presents to any challenge. Booth vigorously insists on the qualified knower’s central role:

What is thus demanded by the principle of systematic assent is more rigorous thought than is
customary about who "we" are, the group of relevant judges, the axiological experts whose shared experiences confirm what we know together. Nobody ever gives equal weight to every voice. What satisfies us in practice, though the practice always can and should be refined, is the discovery that a given belief that fits our own structures of perception and belief is supported by those qualified to know. (p. 108)

Booth already begged the question about the content to which audiences must assent. Now, he also evades answering, "Who is qualified to know?"

Scholars criticize the way the concept of qualified knowers operates in a tautological and therefore self-serving, legitimating manner (Brinton, 1995; Williams and Hazen, 1990, passim). In fact, Booth recognizes the problem but requests forbearance. He explains that the full meaning of the choice I am making, with its deliberate embrace of circularity, will be clearer as I go along. For now it is enough if you will entertain the possibility of a kind of social test for truth: 'It is reasonable to grant (one ought to grant) some degree of credence to whatever qualified men and women agree on, unless
one has specific and stronger reasons to disbelieve. (p. 101)

As many of his critics point out (for example, Willard, 1990, pp. 144-148), expertise is needed on a day-to-day basis to accomplish specialized tasks. However, Booth does not refer here to people with, say, technical life-saving skills when he valorizes "axiological experts"; rather he is legitimating people who can assert their values as communal norms.

The privileged ethos of qualified knowers is the counterpart to motivism, Booth's rhetorical villain. Motivism is the reason why cynical skepticism pervades public discourse, Booth suggests, for it "is the notion that an argument is wrong if it can be shown to arise from a hidden motive" (McCloskey, 1995, p. 192). Since the beliefs of qualified knowers are normative, their motives are not considered hidden. Therefore, motivism must refer to aberrant or dissenting beliefs. In several instances, Booth's synonyms for motivism confirm this assessment. For example, he complains that motivists employ an "automatic assumption that the real reasons [speakers offer] are not the public reasons, that the real reasons have something to do with the subconscious, or with class or racial affiliations" (p. 26, emphasis added).
Elsewhere Booth derides the "secret motive" theory as "the unexamined assumption [that] if you can find a class interest or sexual drive or a kinship interest or a childhood trauma—you have explained away whatever 'surface reasons' anyone offers for his beliefs or actions" (p. 25, emphasis added). By equating motivism with identities or distinguishing experiences, Booth protects qualified knowers' authority by according their beliefs with the status of community norms. When their positions are perceived as normative, they cannot count simultaneously as special interests.

In one sense, Booth's concept of motivism correctly objects to essentialist thinking. Audiences cannot determine a speaker's meaning solely from social location or biographical details. Yet, Booth overreacts against these judgments. Although audiences cannot predict speakers' politics on the basis of their identity—for white people espouse both racist and antiracist positions—audiences also cannot understand fully the meaning of a speech without recognizing speakers' social location. White gentiles and white Jews who gave the same antiracist speech would convey similar and different connotations based on the relationships among their identities, the topic, and the audience. Booth's zealousness in throwing out ostensible
character attacks invites skepticism because his motivism theory protects people who embody the community’s norms and unduly burdens people who are “different.”

More to the point, the combination of qualified knowers and motivism undermines the argument Booth is trying to make in support of the rhetoric of assent. This difficulty is evident in Booth’s ongoing exemplar depicting the Nazis and the Jews in World War II Germany. The second time he raises their conflict, he does so in an attempt to explain the logic of qualified knowers:

Needless to say, the various fanatical defenders of nonsense or viciousness, even if backed by millions of SS troops, cannot claim [qualified] support. The Nazis, for example, could never claim that all reasonable and informed men would be forced by reason to agree to the extermination of all Jews: self-evidently, the Jews must be included in any reasonable decision about their fate, and self-evidently, without even the need for consultation, they will be known to disagree with any attempt at a consensus about their extermination. (p. 110)

One basic flaw subverts Booth’s reasoning: Nazis did have qualified support for their antisemitic Aryan philosophy.
Early on, they received international assent for their governance that created an antisemitic norm for the political "global village."

The Nazi government gained assent from a number of "qualified knowers," including the German Federation of Judges, and with them, the German court system, the other Axis nations, and even the Vatican (Fogelman, pp. 23-24). The initial silent acquiescence of other German institutions and the Allied countries was another form of implicit, albeit temporary, assent. With venerable institutions and nations condoning or ignoring the Nazis' rise to power, they could "claim that all reasonable and informed men" of political consequence supported them.

Therefore, the Nazis need not include Jews in planning the "Final Solution," for they were not Aryan and so would not be considered qualified knowers. Clearly, the Nazis felt no "need for consultation" with people they regarded as subhuman. Not only does the concept of qualified knowers exclude Jewish participation in deciding their fate, but motivism also backfires because the Nazis and the international community could disregard Jewish interests as outside the political norm.

This oppressive turn of events twists Booth's declaration that "the burden of irrationality really lies
... on the one who has violated basic communal norms" (p. 161) into a terrifying self-fulfilling prophecy. In his last lecture to the Notre Dame audience, Booth concocts a dialogue between two Jews to illustrate the consequences of systematic doubt. He prefaces this imaginary conversation by asking the audience to imagine "a scene in Germany, mid-twentieth century," and proceeds to imitate two German Jews in conflict:

"For the last time, I plead with you to join me in trying to escape."
"But again I ask, 'Why?'"
"I've already told you. I hear that 'they' have begun gassing us Jews in huge ovens."
"What's your evidence?"
"I was told by C--- who heard it from J--- who had it from . . . ."
"Hearsay! I want evidence!"
"Look, have I ever been wrong in such matters?" (p. 159)

Even though Booth is not a Jew—he points out he was raised as a fundamentalist Mormon (p. 40)—he confidently speaks for Jewish people. Moreover, he regards his fabrication about them as nothing more than a "debate . . . about whether the skeptic will live to hold other debates" (p. 130)
159). In a chilling conclusion, he decides that the skeptical Jew will not survive, for his “refusal to believe the evidence, such as it was, proved suicidal for millions” (p. 159, emphasis added).

Incredibly, Booth seems oblivious to the fact that he has just blamed the Jews for the Holocaust, making them complicit in a “reality refusal” for which they suffered and died. He continues to contend that the Jews’ negative credulity toward the Nazis genocidal plan caused their collective “suicide.” With unabashed certainty, he claims, “Given the right assumptions about mankind, about Germany, and about the Nazis, anyone in Germany should have been able to conclude, on daily evidence of many kinds (none ‘conclusive’ of course) that atrocities had been committed and that more would be” (p. 159, emphasis added). This judgment comes from a man who was not in Germany, who did not believe the atrocity stories, and who grossly exaggerates Jewish skepticism at least in part to exonerate his own disbelief.

The abhorrent conclusion to Booth’s exemplar should be condemned for its antisemitic reasoning and its self-serving results. The serious pitfalls in the exemplar, however, are not cause enough to dismiss the rhetoric of assent entirely. White antiracists who oppose antisemitism still may find
value in Booth’s initial concerns about the degradation of public discourse and cynical skepticism, even if they do not follow the rhetoric of assent’s epistemological procedures. They may also take heart in what Booth hoped to do, but did not accomplish. Booth spelled out both his worry and his vision when he wrote:

My concern is with a befouled rhetorical climate which prevents our meeting to discover and pursue common interests. What we must find, I think are grounds for confidence in a multiplicity of ways of knowing. (p. 99)

Unfortunately, Booth’s rhetorical theory and procedures cannot promote diverse epistemologies because they reinscribe the dominant culture’s way of knowing. Locating the “grounds of confidence” must be found some other way.

Even here, Booth’s work offers another direction. Many other rhetorical epistemologists concur with his sentiment that “to assent or dissent truly one must know intersubjectively” (Scott, 1976, p. 259). To learn intersubjectively, rhetors need to work through the dominant culture’s communicative labyrinth with its misdirected presumptions, norms, assent, and invisible operations. They must evaluate their own positions rather than attribute them an advantaged, unquestioned status.
In practice, this means that white antiracists need to participate in interracial dialogues without automatically having the final say. They also cannot invoke community norms confidently without inspecting them for racism. Furthermore, white antiracists also cannot rely solely on their own qualifications as knowers to conduct this inspection. Too often, their own implicit assent to their racial privilege leads them to dismiss the perspectives of Jews and people of color in a reactive manner. White antiracists also cannot evade their racism by granting epistemic privilege to the people they oppress. The old dominant strategies—communicative business-as-usual—will not work because intersubjective learning requires white people to be willing to be open to others and to be accountable for their own antiracist rhetoric and actions.

With all that said and done, openness and accountability cannot be considered as magical formulas which guarantee global change. They are two examples of communication skills that white people may use to change the constricted ways they relate to and from their racism. Their “magic” also fades in practice, for they are difficult processes to sustain in most communicative contexts. A case in point is my own reaction to the antisemitic conclusions I found in Booth’s exemplar.
My antiracist rhetorical analysis of Booth's text necessitated constant attention to the power that subject positions exert on the communicative process. For example, if Booth had been Jewish, I might have seen his racist exemplar as self-hating rather than hateful. If I were Jewish, I most likely would have disagreed with his analysis, but, given the common desire for victims of crimes--let alone genocidal tragedies--to want to claim control of their lives, I also could have agreed with Booth's criticism of Jewish disbelief. At least, such a decision would not leave one at the fate of the Nazis.

Since I am not Jewish, I may condemn Booth too harshly to ward off any identification with his position or his theory. If I do maintain this distance successfully, I can scapegoat him and not deal with any antisemitism of my own (I was raised Catholic) similar to how many white people declare that they are not racist because they do not belong to the Ku Klux Klan or belong to white supremacist groups. And, given that Booth and I write as academics using similar epistemological conventions, I could be reinscribing the same oppressive epistemic norms for which I criticize him.

Of all these possibilities, how would I know how to take a stand? I return to the communicative skills of openness and accountability. Openness requires that I
consider all these options and others brought to my attention rather than reject any to preserve a dominant sense of myself as a white gentile academic critic. Accountability insists I seek out all possibilities and not lean upon privileged ignorance as a disclaimer. Through this search I need to maintain an ethical eye on the process of my learning and writing, and respond to either criticism or praise with integrity: without being judgmental or reactive.

Often, I feel overwhelmed by the vigilance of this approach, and I ask again, “How do I know what I know and trust that I know it well?” The answer is the same. To know anything well, I must be open to its change; otherwise, I would struggle to keep an idea fixed in my mind. Still, every idea and every understanding has a resting moment upon which I base my speech and my actions. For these moments, I must be accountable. These skills have become for me the essence of personal, social, and academic integrity.

Presently, I try to combine the skills of openness and accountability with three conceptual guideposts to find my way through racist rhetorical labyrinths. The three concepts are position, power, and process and constitute the heart of the rhetorical method informing this research. They assist me in evaluating the different scenarios brought
on by the power attributed various subject positions in a
dialogic process, for I look at how these three concepts
interact in a rhetorical situation.

In the case of white antiracist rhetoric, I usually
wonder whether white rhetors employ racist power to affect
the communicative process. Most of the time, they do. Then
I try to unravel the "tricky" rhetoric of privilege, with
its variations in the level of awareness rhetors bring to
the communicative process and the confusing jumble of
presumptive norms. At the same time, I also must look for
the presence of racist power in my own thinking and writing.
Sometimes I find it and try to change it; at other times, I
bet I miss it.

Together, the alliterative combination of position,
power, and process offers three steady guideposts for
learning intersubjectively. If people combine this
intellectual analysis with the communicative skills of
openness and accountability--what I would call a politicized
compassionate awareness--we might find the grounds for
confidence in assessing the multiple epistemologies and
rhetorics operating in public discourse. In sum, we could
assent to a process of investigation and not privilege
automatically any one position.
CHAPTER FOUR

ALLYING WITH MS. ANN: WORKING THROUGH WHITE FEMINIST RACISM

In 1974, Haig Bosmajian urged white Americans to study the language of their own racism. Such study is necessary, he wrote, because “[a]ttempts to eradicate racism in the United States have been focused notably on the blacks of America, not on the whites . . . we very seldom have heard or seen any extensive public dialogue, literature or programs directly related to the source of the racism—the white American” (1974, p. 33). Today, Bosmajian’s call remains salient for scholars in communication studies because our research on racism, too, has been focused primarily on black people and, to a much lesser extent, on people of color in general. White people’s position as the “source of . . . racism,” however, has been obscured and largely ignored by this focus.

In part, making people of color central to the study of racism is necessary to reveal the limits of dominant communication paradigms and to justify an investigation into
the lives of people of color on their own terms. This focus directly challenges racist theories and revalues “minority” communication practices. Yet, equating the study of racism with people of color also reinforces the perception that racism is their issue alone. This perspective, along with white people’s conspicuous absence as the source of racism, perpetuates one-sided research questions such as: how can people of color get access to historically racist educational institutions? Equal opportunity in the job market? Better representation in the media? End welfare and crime? In short, omitting white people from the study of racism has much of the scholarly community asking, “How can people of color end racism?”

In other disciplines and very recently in communication studies, scholars have sought to rectify this “blame-the-victim” effect by investigating whiteness. At first, their approach appeared to be a logical corrective, for it answered both Bosmajian’s call to address the source of racism and complemented the research being done on people of color. Many of their efforts to analyze whiteness, however, compounded the problems of researching racism. One recent survey of the literary scholarship on whiteness noted how the “pervasive nonpresence [and] invisibility” of whiteness allowed it to function normatively as “unmarked superiority”
(Keating, 1995, p. 904). For example, *difference* was regarded as a quality inherent in nonwhite people rather than as an observation of contrasts between people of color and white people. In this way, white scholars located racial differences outside themselves rather than in relation to their whiteness. In short, because they failed to recognize the content and effects of whiteness, white scholars ironically reinscribed racial dominance into their anti-racist research.

Because this undesirable reinscription persists, white feminist scholar McIntosh maintains that whiteness continues to be "an elusive and fugitive subject" (1986/1992, p. 75). White "invisibility" structures both epistemological difficulties and moral dilemmas for its researchers. After presenting a list of 46 ways in which white privilege creates unfair and unearned racial advantages for her, McIntosh remarks that the "pressure to avoid [white privilege] is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. [If white privilege exists] many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own [and therefore] my moral condition is not what I had been led to believe" (pp. 75-76). Together, the moral liabilities and epistemological limitations surrounding the study of whiteness hinder even well-intentioned white people who want
to change the racist construction of Euro-American\textsuperscript{16} identities and white racist practices against people of color.

Like other white scholars, white feminists require assistance both in recognizing whiteness and in facing its racist effects on ourselves and others. One abundant resource exists in womanist\textsuperscript{11} scholarship on white feminist racism. In work written directly to white feminists, womanists clearly identify whiteness as racial dominance. They expound on its deleterious effects for women of color and white women and insist upon anti-racist transformation. Despite this extensive and enduring commentary, white feminists have not addressed womanists' critical vision systematically in our anti-racist writings on whiteness. In part, this silence raises concerns about accuracy in anti-racist white feminist scholarship. More significantly, though, the spotty acknowledgments and wholesale omissions characterizing much white feminist writing on racist whiteness are contentious because they obviously impede interracial dialogue. By disregarding womanist scholarship, white feminists further complicate the moral and epistemological difficulties in studying the racism in our racial identities.
To work through these issues and promote dialogue between white feminists and womanists, I would like to propose a two-fold practice for white feminist scholars studying whiteness and racism. My ideas are simple and forthright, almost embarrassingly so, but they respond directly to the white feminist's dilemma of reinscribing racism into her anti-racist scholarship. First, to study the racist whiteness we concede is present but do not recognize, white feminists need to see ourselves through womanists' eyes. Quite simply, we need to be willing to consider whether our moral condition, to paraphrase McIntosh, leaves us something in which we can believe. Second, to sustain our willingness to learn, we also need to cultivate compassionate ways of knowing. Too often, guilt, shame, and anger obstruct white feminists from taking individual responsibility for racism, therefore collectively condemning the possibility of social transformation. This two-fold practice of receiving womanists' returned gaze and generating compassion for what we learn may enable white feminists to recognize the racism in our whiteness. With this pair of basic skills, white feminist scholarship on whiteness and racism may be more effective in its support of anti-racist alliances.
MEETING MS. ANN

If white feminists were to open up to the returned gaze of womanists, we would meet Ms. Ann. She is the feminist revision of Miss Anne, the trope for stereotypically racist white women in contemporary African-American fiction. Although not always explicitly named, Miss Anne appears in black people's writing as many different characters, including: terrible goddess, destructive bitch, white trash, benevolent witch, thrill-seeking "slummer," confident-sage and "white-negro woman" (Chupa, 1990; Ferreira, 1991). However she is depicted, Miss Anne's racism makes white women superficial in their interracial relationships yet obsessed with controlling them. Consequently, Miss Anne's various representations are riddled with grotesque ego defenses that "belie a critical emptiness" (Chupa, 1990, p. xx). In her capacity as a fictional category for white women's racism, Miss Anne becomes the tropic repository for African-American rage and despair over white women's betrayals.

With the second wave of feminism, Miss Anne converts into Ms. Ann, an updated feminist rendition of the plantation mistress or the domestic employer. Although explicitly committed to antiracist politics, Ms. Ann exerts control over (white) feminist theory and praxis in numerous
ways. She constructs a vision of liberated womanhood in her own image and then invites all women to join her under the rubric of sisterhood. She declares patriarchy evil and valorizes "women-identified women," gynocriticism, and consciousness-raising groups. Lest one believe her to be a passé caricature, Ms. Ann currently responds to charges of racism, classism, and heterosexism with attempts at inclusion. Usually her efforts result in reasserting her authority to "add others and stir" them into her projects and paradigms. Charged with tokenism, she becomes defensive and sincerely bewildered. She retreats in exasperation or immerses herself in the "other." Sometimes she studies race, class, and heterosexual privilege—but only from privileged perspectives. Or perhaps she argues that, as an individual, she can divest/disassociate/disaffiliate herself of her particular structural advantages. In all these ways, Ms. Ann remains at the center of her world and confident of her feminist credentials. She's trying, after all.

One of the most significant ways Ms. Ann undermines white women's anti-racist feminism is by insisting upon safety in enacting it. When white feminists demand safety in interracial dialogues or a "safe space" for conducting interracial alliances, our desire for control is evident. Under Ms. Ann's influence, white feminists utilize the
concept of safety to police confrontation and regulate the degree of risk we experience in coalition work. Managing safety levels becomes critical for many of us, for once we recognize our racism, we become accountable for a white culture and history beyond our control and often beneath our awareness. White feminist Jeanne Perrault describes the process:

The moment that a white person, in this case a white feminist, realizes that the external or social injustice of white privilege has a significant bearing on her own life . . . she learns that many of her social and material advantages, which she may have believed were the sole result of hard work, are the unearned privileges of skin. More shatteringly, she also learns that her everyday life (her unselfconscious attitudes, assumptions, habits) is certainly the product and may be the perpetuator of the racist system in which she lives. In brief, that she is a racist. (1994, p. 226)

In large part, I believe, white women’s aversion to confronting Ms. Ann—that is, the unexcavated racism in ourselves and our feminist praxis—derives from the shock we feel upon learning the degree to which racism shapes our
everyday being. Without skills for an anti-racist recovery, white feminists instead avoid knowing the moral liabilities of our racism. This avoidance, in turn, limits our ways of knowing the contents and effects of whiteness.

ENCOUNTERING THE RETURNED GAZE

Seeing oneself through another's critical gaze is challenging work. The experience even may be excruciating when what is seen calls into question one's moral standing. As I will discuss later, a politicized compassion may assist white feminists in these struggles. Prior to working through our resistance, however, I wish to review what we resist: white feminist racism as it is described in womanist scholarship.

Under review here are seventeen essays and two poems on white feminist racism written by black feminists and womanists between 1978 and 1994. This collection of work is not exhaustive: I compiled it during undergraduate and graduate courses in women’s studies and through personal interest in antiracist alliances. With titles such as "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood" (Carby, 1981), "Womanist/Feminist Dialogue" (Williams, 1993) and "For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to Be My Friend" (Parker, 1978/1990), the scholarship was not difficult to locate. In these and the other works
under review, womanists return the racial gaze. They write
directly to white feminists and confront us with Ms. Ann's
racist impact on their lives.

First and foremost, womanist scholarship instructs its
readers about black women's lives. Within the multifaceted
complexity of black women's experiences, this literature
base specifically focuses on white feminist racism, its
effects on black women and, to a lesser extent, its shaping
of white women's ways of knowing and relating. In focus and
analysis, then, this corpus has taught me much about black
women's perspectives on their lives and mine. Throughout my
reading, I did not attempt to determine whether individual
womanists were "right" about white women's racism in the
particular events described or generalizations inferred.
Despite the defensive pull of identification with white
women in the literature, I tried to read in order to be
introduced to Ms. Ann: to learn how womanists perceive,
experience, and analyze her presence in white feminists.

Re-presenting womanist scholarship here, however,
creates the precarious dynamic of speaking for others whom
people like me oppress. Therefore, let me take a moment to
clarify and take responsibility for what follows. As I have
said, I read womanist texts in part to take the antiracist
step of seeing my whiteness through black women's eyes. So
what I am about to report on is what I’ve learned from what I’ve read, which is not the same as what was written. I am not offering an authoritative reading of black women’s writing. Instead, I am acknowledging and responding to communication directed to white women like me. Therefore, the analysis that follows is my understanding of what womanists have been trying to tell white feminists about our whiteness and our racism.

I am encouraged by the example of other white women who have risked learning difficult truths about themselves from women (and men) of color. For instance, feminist theologian Sharon Welch has analyzed black women’s novels (including the work of Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Mildred Taylor and Toni Cade Bambara) for their “moral wisdom” and their capacity to instruct in survival and transformation. “These stories,” she writes, “offer salvation and healing to Euro-Americans as well. Not written for us, but indicting us and our power, they offer the insight we need to stop our collective self-destruction, the abuse of power that threatens all life” (1990, p. 18). Likewise, Joan Halifax--a Buddhist scholar, anthropologist and deep ecologist--writes about the power of stories she’s learned from native peoples of the Americas. She writes that their “stories have helped me face the truth of things as they are, even in
their changing. They have prepared me in the best way for the worst” (1993, p. 21). In a similar spirit, I read womanist literature on whiteness as one form of a reality check that, depending on what I do with it, may help me make significant anti-racist changes.

THE GAZE RETURNED

In her poem, “To Ms. Ann,” Lucille Clifton tells white women, "you never called me sister / and it has only been forever" (1987). Black women’s mistrust of white women is the most persistent theme in the womanist scholarship I reviewed. Every author conveyed experience with trust being broken; some supplied anecdotes while others made lists cataloguing “the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation” (Lorde, 1984, “The Uses of Anger,” p. 124). Quite often, womanists described white women as being apparently oblivious to the harm done.

In particular, black women mistrust white women’s communication. They have good reason, maintains the poet and essayist Audre Lorde, for the “history of white women who are unable to hear Black women’s words, or to maintain a dialogue with us, is long and discouraging” (1984, p. 66). Communication scholar Marsha Houston concurs in her
description of the difficulties black women encounter when they talk with white women. According to Houston, both black and white women allow mutually negative stereotypes to filter perceptions of each other. From black women's perspectives, however, white women strain conversations with dismissive comments such as, "I never even notice [you're black]," "you're different [from other black people I know]," and "I understand your experience as a black woman [because I've had similar experiences]" (1994, pp. 137-138). In effect, white women's communication "subtracts" the racial content of black women's identities so that white women can relate as women on the racially unmarked terms of Ms. Ann.

Said another way, white women acknowledge black women's racial identity even as we erase its significance. This paradoxical capacity for vacant recognition creates the conditions for tokenism and exploitative relations. "I knew it was coming," writes poet Lorraine Bethel, "when she said 'You don't know me, / but I got your name from . . . .'" (1979, p. 86). Declaring "[t]hey never know us," Bethel rejects her token status and getting used up by "fatigue and anger at always being a misunderstood,/ overworked,/ undervalued part of someone else's program/ For free" (p. 89). Instead, in "an open letter to movement white girls,"
she announces, "Dear Ms Ann Glad Cosmic Woomon, / We're not doing that kind of work any more/ educating white women/ teaching Colored Herstory 101" (p. 88). Ten years later, Donna Allegra also refuses assimilationist work, although she regrets her own attempt at "getting across as a token" (1989, p. 152). Now she critiques appropriation, saying:

Once I looked with trust to the feminist option
[but now] I resent feeling that they want us
around for the power of our image . . . . So many women who are talking about racism are more concerned about public relations than they are with gut-level sisterhood. (1989, p. 153)

Racial mistrust "costs" both black and white women, albeit in different ways. In addition to tokenism, exploitation and appropriation, womanists describe numerous other racist effects. Of particular interest to me as a white feminist communication scholar are the costs incurred in the university. Several womanists, academics themselves, write about their concerns. For example, bell hooks contends,

While it is true that the nature of racist oppression and exploitation has changed as slavery has ended and the apartheid structure of Jim Crow has legally changed, white supremacy continues to
shape perspectives on reality and to inform the social status of black people and all people of color. Nowhere is this more evident than in university settings. And often it is the liberal folks in those settings who are unwilling to acknowledge this truth. (1989, p. 114)

Elsewhere, hooks discusses the costs to her of white supremacy in the university. For white feminists, however, hooks' claim indicates that Ms. Ann's pervasive influence damages our communication skills, strains our relations with black women, and impairs our scholarship. The latter contention is borne out also by Maxine Baca Zinn, Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Bonnie Thornton Dill's analysis of white feminist scholarship. In "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies" (1986/1990), the four theorists describe three common academic practices through which white feminists subordinate race and class issues to white, middle-class women's gender. Their collaborative observations also could apply to feminist studies across the disciplines.

The first "exclusionary practice," report Zinn and her colleagues, relegates race and class as "secondary features" to be analyzed under the concept of a "universalized female subordination" (p. 34). This approach allows white, middle-
class women's experiences to operate as the female norm and to act as a standard by which all other women's experiences must be compared and explained. Should white feminist scholars recognize that race, class, and gender combine to create different experiences for different women, a second exclusionary practice leaves these differences unanalyzed due to an ostensible "lack of information" (p. 34) about the lives of women of color.  

A widely circulated critique of this second exclusionary practice is Audre Lorde's "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" (1984, pp. 66-71). Protesting Daly's depiction of women of color exclusively as victims and not as representatives of female power in her book, *Gyn/Ecology*, Lorde writes,  

> It is obvious that you have done a tremendous amount of work for this book. But simply because so little material on nonwhite female power and symbol exists in white women's words from a radical feminist perspective, to exclude this aspect of connection from even comment in your work is to deny the fountain of noneuropean strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is also to make a point by choice. (p. 68)
The third exclusionary practice permits different women's experiences but funnels their interpretations through dominant feminist theoretical frameworks (Zinn, et al., p. 34). This practice has drawn some of womanists' most emphatic criticisms because, unlike the first two practices of omission and dismissal, representing women's diverse experiences is presented as an inclusive technique. If a representation of diversity occurs on Ms. Ann's terms—in whatever theoretical guise she wears—it functions as appropriation. I draw again from Lorde's letter to illustrate the interrelatedness of these practices and not because Daly's work is singularly or unusually racist. "To me," writes Lorde, "this [representation of black women as victims] feels like another instance of the knowledge, crone-ology and work of women of Color being ghettoized by a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western european frame of reference" (p. 68).

Related to these concerns over white feminist academic practices are more specific criticisms regarding the concepts we employ. For example, both literary scholar Hazel Carby and theologian Delores Williams suggest that several key tenets of feminist theory alienate black women. Three central concepts Carby objects to are family, patriarchy, and reproduction (1981, p. 214). Hers is not a
Wholesale rejection of these terms but rather a cautionary tale about their unexamined imposition on black women’s lives. “When used,” Carby writes, “[these concepts] are placed in a context of the herstory of white (frequently middle class) women and become contradictory when applied to the lives and experiences of black women” (p. 214). For example, she says black feminists “would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression” (p. 214).

More recently, Delores Williams describes “problems with feminist-womanist communication that were conjured up by the vocabulary feminists use—a vocabulary that has been in vogue in the academy for some time” (1993, p. 68). For her, theory, argument, and privilege are three words that “seemed to me to cut off dialogue rather than encourage it” (p. 68). Like Carby, Williams notes how these terms carry different meanings within the womanist community from those circulating in white feminist networks. Not only do these terms signify different world views and experiences, but they also can misrepresent white women. Williams maintains that feminist use of “white privilege to challenge society’s way of granting favor to white-skinned people . . . misnames
the reality to which feminists refer" because of the positive connotations attached to privilege (pp. 70-71). Moreover, Carby and Williams are concerned not only that these concepts can be misapplied with racist consequences for black women but that the terminology also expresses a value system holding little regard for black subjectivity and interracial relations. Williams explains:

The choice of language and issues suggests with whom a group or community wants to be in relation and dialogue. Current feminist fascination with theory and epistemology indicates the serious degree to which white feminists want to be in relation and dialogue with white males and the patriarchal culture they have created. (p. 73)

In sum, womanists ask white feminists to examine the politics of our communication and the racist effects of our actions. They ask us to be aware of the differences race makes in understanding and analyzing women's experiences. This entails seeing race as a relevant factor not only for women of color but also for white women's experiences of gender. It also demands that we investigate the racist expression of white womanhood inherent in Ms. Ann and the ways in which she obstructs womanist/feminist dialogue and coalitions. For white women, seeing our whiteness through
womanist eyes helps us see ourselves as raced and racist. Without this dual recognition, white women cannot hope for antiracist change. Moreover, we would not be able to respond to Delores Williams’ bottom-ine declaration, "For womanists, the issue is: What kind of action on behalf of black women’s liberation, survival and positive quality of life can result from feminist-womanist dialogue . . . bound by the presuppositions of white culture" (p. 73)?

ALLYING WITH MS. ANN

The need to identify the "presuppositions of white culture" undermining white women’s antiracist actions has meant that many white feminists have begun to turn the racial gaze inward in an effort to explore the racism in whiteness. In a sense, then, white feminists are allying with Ms. Ann and working with our racist selves in order to become better antiracist allies to womanists and other women of color. Like an untrustworthy ally, however, Ms. Ann can obscure white feminist comprehension of racist whiteness by creating ego defenses out of racial insecurities and uncertainties. The current limits of racial introspection have been noted by both womanists and white feminists, and so I turn now to both groups and their commentaries on these unacceptable constraints. After identifying white feminist defenses that reinscribe racism, I discuss compassion as a
means for realizing better intra- and inter-racial alliances.

Fearing our moral fallibility, white feminists most often avoid or abandon the antiracist struggle just when it comes to examining ourselves rather than focusing on helping others. One white feminist, Blanche McCrary Boyd, typifies the resistance engendered by this fear in her reaction to a weekend workshop on antiracism for white women. After the weekend was over she observed, "This emotionally exhausting workshop convinced me we were trying to move a mountain with teaspoons. White women seemed a swamp of ugly, hidden impulses" (1982, pp. 154-155). In despair, Boyd gave up on antiracist feminism, lamenting, "I couldn't stop being white, so I stopped being political" (p. 155).

Some white feminists, however, do try to stop being white as they attempt to don a politically chic blackness (Bethel, 1979, p. 89; Camper, 1994, p. 40; hooks, 1992, pp. 21-39). Still others martyr themselves over their whiteness or go to the other extreme and become "the 'good white'" who knows all about racism and is above it (Yamato, 1987/1990, p. 21). These and other similar responses spare white women from experiencing the pain of confronting racism as they allow us to maintain our racial privilege. Quite possibly, they are not meant as aversions, but they nevertheless
prevent us from developing the ability to transform. Jeanne
Perrault, who earlier described the pain white women undergo
in facing their racism, also offers an explanation for why
white feminists writhe against accepting it:

Because our white woman of conscience is a
feminist, she finds it intolerable that she is
part of the problem. She is, after all, used to
being the oppressed, not the oppressor. This
realization offers a profound challenge to her

Whether we find our racism intolerable or struggle for some
other reason, white feminists need to find the wherewithal
to work through our resistance rather than reinforce it.

Although Ms. Ann has produced many ineffectual allies,
white feminists are not, on average, novices at coalition
work. In fact, “processing” is wryly heralded as a feminist
specialty. Yet, all white feminists know the wrenching
feelings or have heard the heart-wearying tales of bitter,
divisive group conflicts. So as not to respond to these
experiences by succumbing to the temptation to “stop being
political,” white feminists first need to examine our
expectations of alliances.

The subject of alliances is complex and vast, so I make
no pretense of covering the topic in its entirety here. In
particular, I want to address the role of compassion in sustaining alliances. While most womanist and feminist literature on alliance-building rightly focuses on relating across our differences, I’d like to highlight compassion—the second part of the two-fold practice for antiracist white feminism—as a means of enabling white women to ally within.

This emphasis is warranted, I believe, because the conventional understanding of allying with an enemy or stranger prepares one for the risk of betrayal by these outsiders. Yet, as white feminists confront the racial and racist elements of our identities, we constantly risk betraying ourselves and others because the "enemy" is within and a stranger to us. How can white feminists work to overcome the racism in our whiteness that we have come to despise and yet don’t recognize readily?

Many womanists urge white women to witness the negative impact of racism on our lives and to commit to anti-racist change for our own good. Barbara Smith contends that investigating white racism is not "a favor for someone else, solely to benefit Third World Women." On the contrary, she asserts, "racism distorts and lessens your own lives as white women [and] affects your chances for survival, too" (1982/1990, p. 26). If white feminists recognized the anti-
racist struggle as our own, aversion for and abandonment of the cause might be less likely because we would realize we were avoiding and abandoning ourselves along with women of color. In a similar vein, we could see escaping into the racial other or embracing a utopian image of our own efforts as variations of defensive resistance. In response to this confusing array, I am advocating a politicized compassion to enable white feminists to meet our epistemological limitations and moral fallibilities without turning away.

First, let me clarify what I mean by compassion. Compassion is a "strength," says Sharon Salzberg, that "allows us to bear witness to ... suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear; it allows us to name injustice without hesitation, and to act strongly, with all the skill at our disposal" (1995, p.103.) In brief, she says, compassion is the ability to acknowledge and be "open to pain" (p. 104). Salzberg's definition of compassion, along with those of other socially engaged Buddhists and liberation theologists, strongly suggests that compassion is the ability to extend to ourselves and others a willingness to trust in each other's basic integrity as we encounter risk in relationships. It does not require that an ally always be right in her analysis or action but that she proceed with "right effort" and remain open to
constructive criticism and change. (Obviously, this principle applies to my analysis in this chapter as well.) This willingness to trust through compassion can anchor anti-racist alliances as it enables white feminists to work through racist limitations and vulnerabilities without recourse to a controlling concept of safety.

Ironically, though, compassion remains counterintuitive to the experience of most alliances. Instead, trusting one’s ally is perceived as naive, while cynically preparing for betrayal is savvy and wise. Compassion itself can be problematic if used as a distancing mechanism allowing white women to pridefully “help” women of color or permit individual instances of compassionate support to suffice. Any of these inclinations, even if culled from countless disappointments and reasonable expectations, result more in a self-fulfilling prophecy than in protection from pain. By expecting broken alliances, allies inevitably strain relationships to the breaking point. On the other hand, if allies expect to struggle without strife, these attitudes, too, endanger alliances. White feminists cannot afford to lean on either cynicism or idealism.

A more grounded approach to forging alliance regards the effort to ally compassionately and does not expect an already established common understanding of how to cooperate
usefully and well. One of the purposes of allying is to produce a common and ongoing understanding of what it means to work together toward a particular antiracist goal. In the case of white feminists learning to ally with our racist selves, we extend compassion within, particularly during moments when we fail. This does not mean we dismiss a racist outcome with a "better-luck-next-time" attitude. Nor do we impose a judgmental condemnation on ourselves as a mode of explanation or a means of closure. Instead, we can draw on the old adage and "learn from our mistakes." If we can do so with a kind regard generated from compassion, we actually would facilitate the learning process. We need to act towards ourselves as a good friend would, telling ourselves difficult truths as a necessarily kind act.

Although most literature on alliances considers the trustworthiness of the person or group with whom one is allying, attention is given also to the ability to trust oneself. A central concern of Akiba Onada-Sikwoia emphasizes this self-reflexivity: "But the person I really have to trust is myself--can I take care of myself in relationship with this person?" (p. 45). For white feminists, the same question prevails, but with the different political dynamics engendered by Ms. Ann. Our compassionate anti-racist practice, therefore, must
incorporate an awareness of the politics of our racial
dominance. Taking care of ourselves in relationships with
womanists must be an endeavor in which we balance care-
taking with risk-taking.

If white feminists focus on taking care of ourselves as
we are and on remedying our own situation and concerns, we
once again wrongfully recenter our racist selves as we
reinscribe Ms. Ann’s dominance. Therefore, taking good care
in anti-racist alliances risks Ms. Ann’s continued influence
on our ways of knowing and relating. White women cannot
continue to understand our racial location as separate from
and unaffected by dominance and racism. In part, risking
Ms. Ann entails reconceptualizing self-care as a matter of
relational responsibility. This means that white feminists
do anti-racist work independently and with each other, but
we simultaneously forge our anti-racist practice in
relationship with black women and other women of color. The
necessity of relationships in insuring personal change is
explained by Charlotte Joko Beck:

There is no way that is superior to relationships
in helping us see where we're stuck and what we're
holding on to. As long as our buttons are pushed,
we have a great chance to learn and grow. So a
relationship is a great gift, not because it makes
us happy—it often doesn't—but because any intimate relationship, if we view it as practice, is the clearest mirror we can find. (1989, p. 89)

In this spirit, allying with Ms. Ann becomes a necessarily compassionate practice, enabling us to "learn and grow" from having our buttons pushed.

An antiracist practice informed by compassionate, relational responsibility creates a space where white feminists can learn to relate to Ms. Ann instead of unwittingly relating directly from her.¹⁹ In this way, white feminists can ally within and change our ways of knowing and relating to our racial identity and its racist components. From this position of personal and political integrity, more effective antiracist practice can begin.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

We transform suffering by changing the way we relate to it.
-Mark Epstein

Three research questions defined the focus of this study. In this last brief chapter, I revisit these questions and make explicit how my findings relate to them. I do not intend to make new observations here but to review what I have found in my research to identify privilege, to analyze its presumptive place in white antiracist rhetoric, and to reiterate the suggestions made to overcome the anti-epistemic and immoral effects that racial privilege has on white antiracist rhetoric and practice.

In the first chapter, I explained how white antiracist rhetoric is an underdeveloped area in communication studies. In fact, the concepts of whiteness and racial privilege barely have entered into disciplinary parlance. This scholarly void led me to ask my first research question: what is racial privilege and how can it be invisible to white people but defended by us at the same time? I
addressed this question by exploring how scholars across the humanities and social sciences were dealing with privilege in their own disciplines and interdisciplinary work.

First, I arranged the discussion of their scholarship according to its three most prevalent themes: the epistemic, moral, and relational conditions of privilege. All three categories contained many contradictions because of the clash between the positive valence of privilege—which allows extraordinary access to material resources and cultural capital—and its negative valence, which reveals that allowance to be immoral and unjust. The three facets of privilege interrelate and are, in fact, interdependent in sustaining the contradictory nature of privilege.

I began with the premise that rhetoric is epistemic; that dialogues generate knowledge as well as convey preconceived positions. From studying the epistemic conditions of privilege, I can say now that rhetoric also functions anti-epistemically: privileged rhetors may avoid knowledge through their dialogues and promote a determined ignorance instead. To do so, rhetors employ many different rhetorical strategies—drawing principally from the apologia genre—to defend themselves and protect against an awareness of their involvement in white racial privilege.
The desire to defend against knowing how one might be implicated in a racist privilege is a moral issue because the overadvantage an individual or group experiences comes at the expense of other people, disadvantaging them, often in life-threatening ways. Even without direct evidence of how one group’s privilege is another’s prohibition, (paraphrasing Lynne Tirrell, 1993, p. 18), racial privilege is immoral because it only may be obtained and maintained at the expense of the privileged group’s integrity and their willingness to coexist equitably and peacefully with others.

Apparently, one long-term effect of sacrificing integrity for privilege is the atrophy of moral communicative skills that could help white rhetors become effective antiracists. Without practicing these skills with regard to their own racial privilege, white antiracists often feel overwhelmed by the prospect of personal complicity in racism by virtue of being racially privileged. Instead, they retreat to ignorance or a lack of confidence in the possibility that social change ever could occur.

The epistemic and moral conditions interact to produce racial relations where whiteness represents an invisible yet normative ideal and all other races occupy different and disadvantaged positions. These inequitable relations occur because privilege is an immoral process that confers
dominance on white people and consigns an oppressed status onto all racial Others. The immorality of privilege is masked, however, by its anti-epistemic rhetoric.

Racially privileged rhetoric conveys that whiteness is a normative standard as it depicts all other races as different from this ideal and therefore deficient. In addition, its discursive complexity makes the racial norm relatively invisible by treating it as a presumption and shifting the burden of proof for revealing the norm onto those people deemed different and deficient. People of color, therefore, have a double burden, for they challenge the presumption of white racial norms without the cultural authority accorded white people on account of their privilege. Together then, the epistemic, moral, and relational conditions of privilege interact to produce a variety of ways in which white people may defend their racially privileged status— as standards or as rights, for example— without naming these strategies as racism.

My second research question sought to explore these strategies. I wanted to know how racial privilege undermined even white antiracist rhetorical efforts. So I asked, “how does white privilege, acting as presumption, structure antiracist rhetorical strategies?” I looked at two case studies: Wendell Berry’s autobiography, The Hidden
Wound (1970), and Wayne Booth’s rhetorical model, Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent (1974). Both white men are regarded by the majority of their peers as ethicists, par excellence, and convey some awareness of the moral, epistemic, and relational conditions of racial privilege.

Berry’s recollections of his family’s history as slave owners and his own boyhood relationship with two black tenant farmers, Nick Watkins and Georgie Ashby, who worked on his family’s farm, showed how one white man who was committed to exposing the “hidden wound” of his own racism still resorted to an apologia to defend his family’s and his own moral character. The fact that he could attempt to investigate his racism while defending against any implications that investigation may bring to bear on his moral character is made possible by the ways in white privilege functions as presumption in his rhetoric.

First, the presumption of white privilege structures the content of white antiracist rhetoric. If white rhetors presume whiteness as a normative ideal—which they most certainly do unless they have made a conscious effort to challenge this ideology that permeates their lives—they tend to employ anti-epistemic methods in their apologias. Berry inherited a number of these methods from his family’s storytelling and incorporates them into his own. The three
predominant strategies are a determined ignorance, distorted racial representations of self and others, and hiding the pain produced by racism through a "casual" retelling of the facts.

The process of presumptive reasoning also affects Berry’s antiracist rhetoric. Because the presumptive process shifts the burden of proof from the speaker to the audience, Berry can disbelieve and deny the effects of his racism, and his readers are the ones who must prove they exist. This proof may be difficult to produce because, again, white privilege functions invisibly as presumption and because apologists have a number of rhetorical strategies at their disposal to defend themselves against accusation.

Berry uses a particularly rare strategy of admission and denial, whereby he admits structural racism but denies any intent on his part to be racist. This defensive strategy is effective because proving that someone intended to be racist is much more difficult than proving a racist act occurred. This burden of proof protects the apologist’s moral reputation. Indeed, Berry may not have intended to be prejudiced but ends up producing a racist narrative because he writes from within the framework of his own racial privilege. Either way, the audience’s burden of proof to
demonstrate Berry’s racist intent is virtually insurmountable.

White privilege also functions as presumption in Wayne Booth’s rhetorical theorizing. Booth also uses some of the same anti-epistemic apologetic strategies as Berry. For example, Booth explores his initial disbelief of the Nazi atrocity stories and attempts to exonerate his error in moral judgment by displacing the onus of his mistake onto the Jews, whom he argues were “suicidally” skeptic. In sum, his presumption of white privilege combines with an antisemitic defense to produce a rhetorical theory that protects racially privileged Nazis and contemporary Americans by blaming the disadvantaged victims.

Booth’s rhetorical theory, then, joins a long line of antisemitic rhetoric that polices the boundaries of whiteness, according white Christians a higher spot on the racial hierarchy than is allowed white Jews. In fact, this hierarchy is rhetorically and politically maintained by Christians contesting Jewish claims to whiteness, as the newly emerging history of the “not-yet-white ethnic” is beginning to reveal. Although Booth does not contest the racial status of Jews and certainly does not side with the Nazis antisemitic beliefs, his racially privileged apologia produces antisemitic rhetorical effects.
Learning more about how racial privilege, through its presumptive status, undermines white antiracist rhetoric desperately begs the third research question, "can the presumption of white privilege and its adverse effects on antiracist theory and practice be overcome, and, if so, how?" While Berry and Booth offer potentially antiracist rhetorical theories, they both are subverted by the presumptive reasoning process and the racist content produced by presuming white racial privilege as a norm. Therefore, white racial privilege must be identified specifically (as opposed to the more general literature of privilege in the first chapter), and the moral communicative skills for working with this recognition must be restored. This was the two-step process advocated in the fourth chapter, "Allying with Ms. Ann."

The practice I advocate in overcoming white feminist racism draws from my experience of working with my own racial privilege/white racism over the last ten or so years. The women's studies programs in which I earned a bachelor's and a master's degree offered me numerous opportunities to see my racial self through the work of women who were racially oppressed by white people. From them, I learned about the racial privilege into which I was born and for which I am accountable, as Adrienne Rich says in an epigraph
in the second chapter. The metaphor womanist writers use for white women's racial privilege is Miss Ann; the updated term for white feminists is Ms. Ann.

Meeting Ms. Ann—the racist whiteness that racial privilege creates—is a painful process for most white women. Although each white woman must gauge for herself the particulars of her own participation in white privilege as racism, the process can be troubling, particularly for white feminists whose principles are explicitly antiracist. As many of the white feminists surveyed in the literature review attested, they feel strongly tempted to (unconsciously) choose anti-epistemic rhetoric and apologias because they do not know how to unlearn their racist privileges. Consequently, they end up defending against the knowledge of their racism rather than be overwhelmed by an awareness of what they do not know how to change.

Given the tension between antiracist principles and apologias for racial privilege, I am suggesting that white feminists need to develop a compassionate regard for the awareness of their racism generated by womanist writing and scholarship on white feminist racial privilege. In essence, I am advocating, to paraphrase Mark Epstein's epigraph in this chapter, that we transform the suffering caused by our racist privilege by changing the way we relate to it.
Instead of meeting our potential Ms. Ann-ness with the host of defensive responses described in the chapter—such as abandoning whiteness and adopting blackness—white feminists can identify the “presuppositions of white culture,” as Delores Williams suggests, by relating to the racism inherent in racial privilege with compassion rather than aversion or avoidance. This certainly summarizes the purpose and the struggle I faced in researching and writing about white antiracist rhetoric. Each attempt to identify the presuppositions was a walk through the proverbial minefield of my desire to avert or avoid challenges to my racial privilege. It also was an opportunity to relate to my own racism compassionately.

Compassion is a moral communicative skill that strengthens individuals’ ability “to bear witness to . . . suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear” (Salzberg, 1995, p. 103). My hope was that learning to restore this skill within the context of white antiracist theory and practice would enable myself or any white person—feminist or not—to engage the unsettling rounds of ego defenses that emerge when confronted with challenges to our integrity. Currently, I can report that while compassion has not diminished the temptation to ignore or resist accountability for the racism in my own privileged
whiteness, it has helped me manage my own resistance somewhat more effectively.

In part, a politicized compassionate awareness — comprised of the communicative skills of openness and accountability and the intellectual skills to analyze position, power, and process — showed me how whiteness is an ongoing process rather than a fixed identity. It is helping me to become less attached to my ideas about who I am so that I am questioning the cultural authority I have grown accustomed to and counted upon and the material status symbols I use to demonstrate that authority to others. A politicized compassionate awareness is helping me see the moral, epistemological, and relational costs of these advantages, so much so that they don’t feel like complete advantages any more. In this way, I am “being” my whiteness — in the ways Thich Nhat Hanh advocates — in as much of its entirety as I am able now to experience or express.
ENDNOTES

1. Doug Walton defines presumption as "a speech act halfway between assertion and assumption" (1995, p. 133). Certainly, white privilege is assumed by racially privileged rhetors. It also may be asserted when challenged. See also Linda Alcoff's recognition that "privilege carries with it . . . presumption in one's favor when one speaks" (1995, p. 116, n.3)

2. Sissela Bok's classic text, Lying: Moral choice in public and private life (1978), recognizes three types of excuses liars use to prove that they lied under extenuating circumstances:

First, [an excuse] can suggest that what is seen as a fault is not really one. Secondly, it can suggest that, though there has been a fault, the agent is not really blameworthy, because he is not responsible. And finally, it can suggest that, though there has been a fault, and the agent is responsible, he is not really to blame because he has good reasons to do as he did. (p. 74)

This pattern of excuses also becomes prevalent in the analysis of white antiracist rhetoric as apologia.

Exclusionary Practices in Women’s Studies” (1990). For complete citations, see references in the second chapter.

4. By far the longest review of The Hidden Wound is Andrew Angyal’s recent four-page summary (1995, pp. 42-46). He refers to it as “an extended personal meditation on the legacy of slavery and racism” (p. 42) written by Berry “in a confessional mode, combining autobiographical reminiscence, history, and moral reflection in a powerful rhetorical discourse” (p. 43). Angyal offers no critique.


7. Current scholarly literature on white racist discourse is extensive and interdisciplinary. Readers interested in the topic would do well to consult the following: Frankenberg, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; McPhail, 1994; Morrison, 1992, 1993; Spelman, 1988; Spurr, 1993; van Dijk, 1987; Wellman, 1993; and Wetherell and Potter, 1992.

8. The anti-epistemic function extends beyond white discourse on race relations. It also operates whenever race is either invisible or hyper-visible and whiteness is assumed as a universal norm. For example, white feminists typically do not mention the racial identities of the women they study unless they are women of color. Yet these researchers often assume that sexism affects all women as if they were white (and middle class, able bodied, and heterosexual). This oft-cited critique illustrates how white women’s invisibility combines with the hyper-visibility of women of color underneath the rubric of normative whiteness to define sexism in a racist manner.

9. Of course, exceptions exist. Teun van Dijk’s work on elite discourse and racism (1991, 1993) is the most sustained research in communication studies on white people’s role in the creation and reproduction of racism. See also Houston (1994); McPhail (1994a, 1994b); and Nakayama and Krizek (1995). The latter, however, brackets
10. I do not mean to oversimplify the definition of whiteness, nor do I mean to reify it by equating white with Euro-Americans. Racial definitions change over time (Keating, 1995), and Euro-Americans are not the only people who claim white identity. In fact, many biracial and multiracial Americans are grappling with collective self-definitions as they negotiate the sociopolitical dimensions of their white heritage. The focus of this essay, however, is on feminists who identify primarily, if not exclusively, as white and who are committed to anti-racist communication scholarship.

11. Womanist is Alice Walker’s term designating black feminists or feminists of color (1983, p. xi). She explains, “Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (p. xii). Unless an author specifically refers to herself as a black feminist in the work cited, I will use womanist to identify works by black women in this text. I am choosing to respond to womanist scholarship on white feminist racism because it is voluminous, long standing, and unattended to as a body of work by white feminists. Highlighting the relationships between white feminists and womanists is not meant to deny interracial tensions between white women and other women of color nor among women of color themselves.

12. In “What’s Wrong with Miss Anne: Whiteness, Women, and Power in Meridian and Dessa Rose,” Patricia Ferreira offers a range of examples in black women’s fiction: [White women] exhibit characteristics of insensitivity, boastfulness, jealousy, and madness. For example, Mrs. Chandler, of Ann Petry’s The Street, never considers Lutie’s personal circumstances and why she must travel so far from her own home and family in order to make a living. Big Missy, if Margaret Walker’s Jubilee, suspends Vyry from her thumbs in a dark closet for breaking a china plate. Lynne, of Alice Walker’s Meridian, flaunts her white skin in front of Black women when it is to her advantage. And Miss Rufel, of Sherley Anne Williams’ Dessa Rose, demands to see the whip-scarred flesh surrounding Dessa’s vaginal and pubic areas and the “R” branded into her inner thigh before she believes Dessa’s claims of her Mistress’ torture.
13. For the nineteen works under consideration, see note three above.


15. These absences structure, I believe, the scholarly rituals white feminists have adopted for acknowledging the importance of race and class (and other oppressed identities) in our prefaces and our endnotes. They also seem to generate the laundry list-like litany of our own identities white feminists use both to position ourselves and to function as disclaimers.

16. In fairness to Peggy McIntosh, whose work on white privilege was cited earlier, I want to note that she makes the same critique of the term *privilege*. She writes, "the word 'privilege' now seems to me to be misleading. Its connotations are too positive to fit the conditions and behaviors which 'privilege systems' produce" (1986, p. 77). Instead, McIntosh suggests using the phrase *conferred dominance* (p. 77) to describe white people's oppressive status. Criticism of the term is not monolithic. For example, womanist theorist Gloria Yamato uses the phrase *power/privilege* to describe the generative source of racism (1987/1990, p. 22), while Paula Ross employs *privilege* prominently in the title of her essay, "Women, Oppression, Privilege, and Competition" (1987).


18. Ruth Frankenberg discusses white feminists' tendency to see racism "as an issue that people of color have to face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us," a stance that allows white women to "see antiracist work as an act of compassion for an 'other,' an optional, extra project, but not one intimately and organically linked to our own lives" (1993, p. 6). In their study of white racism, Feagin and Vera rightfully insist, "The compassion of scattered white
individuals will not alter the deep and entrenched structure of U. S. racism" (1995, p. 164). Both of these comments attest to the limits of compassion in current antiracist alliances, in terms of its conceptualization and its lack of a widespread practice.

19. The distinction between relating to Ms. Ann as opposed to relating from her comes from Ondrea Levine and Stephen Levine's explanation of how people relate out of "small mind" or "big mind" in response to conflict and pain in relationships (1995, pp. 43-46). Small mind, they contend, constricts our understanding of an ongoing struggle to our isolated perspective. With only our own agitated thoughts to consider, "We make the whole world 'my pain'" (p. 43, original emphasis). Under these conditions, "Small mind relates from its contents" (p. 43, original emphasis), reifying them as one's own righteous reality. Big mind, however, "relates to its contents" (p. 43, original emphasis), generating a perspective beyond "the tiny world of my pain" (p. 43, original emphasis) toward the process which produced the pain in the first place. In this way, people move beyond personal convictions of who's right and who's wrong toward understanding how to make their relationships meaningful.
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186


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