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On Racial Barriers

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ON RACIAL BARRIERS

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2018

ON RACIAL BARRIERS

by

KAYLA R. MEHL, B.A.

THESIS

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Abstract

My thesis examines: the nature of racial barriers, by what means racial barriers manifest in society, and the ways in which we can use racial barriers to evolve toward a more just society. I argue that within particular contexts a look of the Other will construct a racial barrier between racialized bodies. More specifically, when one perceives a threat from a look of the Other, one will undertake a particular—what social psychologists call—self-representation, in attempt to exhibit a particular type of persona they feel is called for in that context. Furthermore, I argue in my paper that racial barriers emerge not only in the presence of particular individuals, but also in the presence of unjust social structures. Thus, I show that one may experience two different types of racial barriers as a result of a perceived threat from the look of the Other. In order to do make this argument for social structures, I draw from the work of Iris Marion Young and her definitions of social structures and structural injustice. By putting Young’s work in dialogue with some fragments of Sartre’s, I am able to show that social structures also have a “look” and “face” and these faces may take the form of objects or symbols, such as the Confederate flag. I use the example of the Confederate flag to illustrate my point that some objects have a “face” of the social structure that is white supremacy. In the final chapter, I argue that at the junctures in which people of color perceive a threat in the form of racial barriers as lived experiences or racial barriers as social structures are trouble spots that need attention and reformation. I further argue that while racial barriers as social structures contravene in our attempts to achieve justice, some racial barriers as lived experiences are imperative for justice—they help people (particularly whites) become aware of the ways in which they are racially privileged or oppressed and thus, serve as measures in developing self-awareness and understanding how race continues to influence our judgement and behaviors.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| Acknowledgements..... | iv |
| Abstract..... | v |
| Table of Contents..... | vi |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 2 |
| Motivation for Project..... | 1 |
| Terms and Frameworks..... | 4 |
| Chapter Overview..... | 15 |
| Chapter 2: Racial Barriers as Lived Experiences..... | 17 |
| The Look of the Other..... | 20 |
| The Look of the Other and Social Identities..... | 23 |
| White Privilege and Racial Oppression and Their Effects on Racial Barriers..... | 32 |
| A White World Devoid of Racial Barriers..... | 36 |
| White Privilege and White Double Consciousness..... | 39 |
| People of Color and Double Consciousness..... | 51 |
| Chapter 3: Racial Barriers as Social Structures..... | 62 |
| Young’s View on Social Structures..... | 64 |
| What Does the Confederate Flag Really Stand For?..... | 67 |
| The Look of the Other and Social Structures..... | 70 |
| How is the Confederate Flag a Racial Barrier?..... | 73 |
| Chapter 4: Conclusion..... | 80 |
| Young on Responsibility..... | 81 |
| Racial Barriers That Need to be Dismantled..... | 85 |
| Racial Barriers That Must Remain..... | 88 |
| Examples and Solutions..... | 91 |
| References..... | 95-97 |
| Vita..... | 98 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Motivation for Project

She spoke while staring down at her desk; she stumbled on her words and hesitated to continue her monologue, worried that what she was saying would offend someone. She rested her elbow on the desk and her head on her hand, and looked at the ground while she tried to think of a more sophisticated way to explain her views. When she looked up to face the class, her eyes were red and welling up with tears. When she spoke her hand gestures were shaky like her voice. This strong, outspoken woman for once was at a loss for words. For once she did not feel confident in what she was saying because she knew she had no authority on the topic. She was a privileged white woman confessing her ignorance on race and racism and was admitting to the prejudices she had due to the way she was raised. She was extremely vulnerable—stricken with anxiety and shame. What triggered this incident was a classroom discussion on race. This white student experienced what I call a racial barrier. Incidents like the one described—which resonate with some of my personal experiences as a white woman—motivated me to write this thesis *On Racial Barriers*.

I have personally experienced situations similar to the one I just described. I have felt disgusted with myself for saying or doing something out of ignorance and privilege. I also have felt disgusted with family and close friends when they have said or done something out of ignorance and privilege. While at lunch with my aunt, I found myself speechless while she took out her phone encased in a Confederate flag and texted using her long, freshly manicured fingernails that were similarly decorated with glamorized Confederate flags. Despite the fact that my aunt and I are both white, I felt anxiety—the type of anxiety I feel when I am acutely aware of my own whiteness around people of color. Some racialized situations make me more anxious than others, but in every instance, the anxiety is triggered by a *social phenomenon*—or an occurrence in which an individual's behaviors are consciously or unconsciously influenced by other individuals, or groups, or a society. The anxiety in such racialized contexts is triggered by

others, regardless of their race, and sometimes the anxiety is self-inflicted. Indeed, when I was at lunch with aunt, it did not matter to me that we were out in public, even if we had been eating lunch at her house, I still would have felt the racial barrier; I created that racial barrier because I perceived something in my aunt that conflicted with my strongly held views—thus, she also contributed to this racial barrier unknowingly. The fact that I am related to this white woman who finds it appropriate to have bedazzled Confederate flags on her nails was enough for me to feel shame and anxiety about my own family and ancestry. She, on the other hand, could not sense the racial barrier she drove me to construct.

Before I go on, I want to first clarify my reasons for writing this thesis. This thesis is not intended to tell people how we ought to approach or put an end to racial injustice. While I am writing to readers of all races and ethnicities, I have a particular interest in reaching out to whites who need to *wake up* to racial barriers. This thesis is intended to help whites understand their whiteness and how their whiteness affects their thoughts and behaviors. It is also intended to help people see race relations and racial injustice from a different philosophical perspective—perhaps helping any person understand why she thinks or feels the way she does in a racialized context. My hope is that readers find themselves in this work and can relate to certain experiences I write about to help them make sense of their thoughts and feelings on race and race relations in terms of racial barriers.

Although the term “racial barrier” is regularly thrown around in conversations concerning politics, economics, and social justice, it has yet to be accurately defined within a clear philosophical framework. Responding to this lacuna, this thesis offers a philosophical approach to understanding racial barriers. The term “racial barrier” has a particularly negative connotation in the contexts in which it is used. The term seems to imply that all racial barriers are innately unjust in that they perpetuate racial inequality. Although racial barriers can in fact be obstructive in the United States’ attempts to achieve social equality, by means of a careful analysis of the *different types* of racial barriers, we are able to see, I argue, how *some* racial barriers are not obstructive but *necessary* in achieving equality. In other words, what I will argue is that there are

many “bad” or obstructive racial barriers that must be dismantled; however, there are also some racial barriers that need to remain intact or need to take form where none exist. When racial barriers are understood from a phenomenological perspective, or from a perspective that takes into account the structures of conscious experience belonging to whites and people of color, we can see that racial barriers exist not only as a political injustice, but also exist within smaller social contexts and at the individual level in ways that respect racial differences and force individuals to recognize their respective privileges.¹ While it may not seem at first-hand that a racial barrier can bring about social justice, the way I define racial barriers shows that in a racially *unjust* society, a white person ought to experience a racial barrier to give rise to racial justice. That is, there are some racial barriers that need to remain standing for respect of people of color in a racially unjust society (this does not hold true for societies in which people of color are not oppressed). For example, in the United States there are fashion trends that are appropriated from cultures of oppressed people. These trends are then publicized and advertised on white models. Turbans, chopsticks in the hair, baby hairs and box braids, kimonos, and so many more trends have been appropriated and have then been on runways on white models. In a society that continues to oppress people belonging to these cultures, a white person ought to experience a racial barrier when imagining, contemplating, or watching something like this. Furthermore, from this perspective, we can see that racial barriers exist differently for different groups of individuals. Racial barriers are more diverse, fluid, and complicated than they appear and serve different functions, which is why their nature and origins need to be further examined in order for us to use them to devise a theory of justice with regard to racial barriers.

With all this in mind, let me briefly define some terms and assumptions I will be employing throughout this thesis. In order to understand what I call a *racial* barrier, I first will clarify what I mean by race in my framework. I begin with how I understand the concept of “race” itself.

¹ The way I define “phenomenological perspective” may be debated; however, for the purposes of this paper (that employs a Sartrean perspective), this is how I will define the term.

Terms and Frameworks

Throughout my thesis I will employ the concept “ethnorace” as used and defined by Linda Alcoff. I will define what Alcoff means by “ethnorace” and explain why she prefers this term over “race”. I will also provide two other views on the concept of “race” as provided by Sally Haslanger and explain why her definitions fall short when applied to my framework on racial barriers. Alcoff points out that the position a person takes on identity “depends heavily on the account one gives of identity’s relation to the self, that is, the relationship between ascribed social categories and the lived experience of consciousness”.² This observation helps explain the different views on race held by Alcoff and Haslanger and why I prefer Alcoff’s definition for discussing my approach to racial barriers.

Alcoff argues that race operates in Western societies as visible marks on the body. Furthermore, Alcoff believes that as a result of social identities being correlated to kinds of perceptual practices, “bodily knowledges” are left out of explicit beliefs and assumptions that are discussed in rational debate.³ However, Alcoff argues that “perception is embodied”—meaning our identities help structure our perceptions and constitute “necessary background knowledge about the world”.⁴ Thus, Alcoff believes identities are not only *visible* but also *embodied*, and one’s embodied experience has a relationship with the one’s concept of the self and of subjectivity which provides one with “a complex set of presuppositions and perceptual orientations, some of which are manifest as a kind of tacit presence in the body”.⁵ In order to acknowledge Alcoff’s point that the source of racialization is in the microprocesses of subjective existence, we must take into account the one’s self-identified identity.⁶

² Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86.

This is how Alcoff describes “embodiment”. Alcoff argues that race is an embodied identity meaning that one’s cognition is deeply influenced by the physical features of the body (i.e. on one’s race).

³ *Ibid*, 92.

⁴ *Ibid*, 126.

⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

⁶ *Ibid*, 185.

Alcoff uses the term *ethnorace*, in order to “bring into play both the elements of human agency and subjectivity involved in ethnicity [while acknowledging] the uncontrolled racialized aspects associated with the visible body”.⁷ The term *ethnorace* respects the specific geographical and historical ancestry that an individual self-identifies with (even though it may not be visibly marked on the body) while also acknowledging that their ethnic bodies are objectively racialized in today’s society that are marked on the body in different ways. People of different *ethnoraces*—of the same *ethnorace*—despite how they self-identify, are objectively racialized and categorized differently and then get situated in a hierarchy—a hierarchy that provides some people (more specifically, whites) with more opportunities than others (people of color), a hierarchy that upholds white privilege.

The reason why I prefer the term *ethnorace* is because I want to take into account in my theory of racial barriers the ethnic groups (e.g. Latinos, Muslims) whose bodies have more recently become racialized in the U.S. and take into account the multitude of ways and degrees people are racialized. Latino, for example, is an ethnic, yet members of this ethnic group have become racialized. However, it gets even more complicated because, as Alcoff argues, not all Latinos “are racialized or racialized to the same degree or in the same way”.⁸ In other words, there are Latinos whose outward appearance does not match their “mythic bloodlines that are thought to determine identity” but still these individuals, despite the fact that they may not look like they are Latino, self-identify as Latino.⁹ Alcoff argues that Latinos and people of other ethnicities either possess or do not possess certain features that are socially racialized. Thus, people who belong to the same ethnicity are likely to be racialized in different ways and in

⁷*Ibid*, 246.

Alcoff argues that there is a difference between the racialized ethnicity of people of color in the United States and the once racialized white ethnic groups (e.g. Irish, Italians, and Jews) because people of color (e.g. African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos) *in this country*, experienced horrendous events such as colonialism, annexation of lands, slavery, and genocide. As a result, Alcoff further argues, “our acceptance as full players within the U.S. society comes at much great cost” because groups like the Irish and Jews are not decedents of those who suffered the injustice that came with “‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ ‘Manifest Destiny,’ ‘Leader of the Free World,’ and other such mythic narratives that legitimate U.S. world dominance and provide white Americans with a strong sense of pride” (Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 243).

⁸ Linda Martin Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XLVII, (2009): 122.

⁹ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 7.

different degrees because “racism can and has operated through a variety of physical features, cultural characteristics and origins, and status as ‘native’ or ‘nonnative’”—this makes the discussion of race and racism far more complex than we originally believed.¹⁰

Alcoff argues that we need to expand the “analysis of racism and [the] attentiveness to the specific forms it can take in regard to different groups, rather than continuing to accept the idea that it operates in basically one way, with one axis, that is differentially distributed among various groups”.¹¹ In other words, people are not merely racialized by the shade of their skin tone. This way of thinking about race and racism motivates our racial discussions to congregate around the black-white binary.¹² Fair-skinned Latinos are still racialized—Alcoff would argue they are just not racialized on the color axis. For the reasons I have provided, in this thesis I will be employing the term “ethnorace” in order to include in my discussion of racial barriers people of all different ethnicities and races who are racialized in different ways and to different degrees and to take into account their embodied experiences and knowledge.

Now that I have defined the concept ethnorace and have explained why I will be using the term, I will now describe two distinct interpretations of the concept “race” as provided by Sally Haslanger, and I will explain why her definitions do not work for my theory of racial barriers.

Haslanger has argued for both an analytic/descriptivist account and, more recently, a reference externalist account of “race”. First, I will describe Haslanger’s more recent reference externalist view on the concept of race. In this particular article, Haslanger argued that:

In considering what we mean by these terms [race and gender] we should treat them on the model of kind terms whose reference is fixed by ordinary uses, but whose content is discovered empirically using social theory... [furthermore] it is not only important to

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² *Ibid*.

determine what we actually mean by these terms, but what we should mean, i.e., what type, if any, we should be tracking.¹³

In other words, Haslanger argues that the term race has a fixed reference in *ordinary use*, but the content, or what the term *should* mean, can only be discovered using social theory—this is due to her belief that racial injustice is a hierarchical and structural problem. In her work “Haslanger distinguishes three kinds of conceptual inquiries one might conduct”—these are conceptual, descriptive, and ameliorative inquiries. We have different purposes for using terms. However, Haslanger argues that those who have a legitimate purpose for using the terms race and gender—that is, if the purpose for using these terms is to *fight oppression*—then one ought to conduct an “ameliorative inquiry”. In other words, these individuals should be discovering and analyzing the concept “race” to determine what we *should* mean when we use the term for the purpose of fighting oppression. Furthermore, Haslanger believes that whether or not the analyses are correct does not matter—what matters is that these analyses are the best for our legitimate purposes (i.e. fighting oppression on the basis of color).

As a result of her approach to describing race, (i.e. because Haslanger is very concerned about fighting oppression and thus the *hierarchical* gender and race terms associated with said oppression), Haslanger opts for using *race* terms and not *color* terms. In Haslanger’s view, “race terms refer to social kinds, while color terms refer to those who share a collection of superficial physical features”. Haslanger believes there is a benefit in employing race terms over color terms because race terms specifically engage with the issues of oppression for the reason that she believes racism is something that needs to be fought at the structural level and does not think that color terms work for her purpose of fighting racial oppression.

In response to this approach to defining race, Jennifer Saul poses a question that challenges Haslanger’s view. Saul asks, “how can we ever hope to study our *actual* usage of *race* concepts, as opposed to *color* concepts?” In other words, how can we—as a society that so strongly depends on color terms to talk about race—study how we currently use the concept

¹³ Sally Haslanger, “Language, Politics, and ‘The Folk’: Looking For ‘The Meaning’ of ‘Race’” *The Monist*, vol. 93, no. 2, (2010): 169.

“race” if we ought not use color terms? I agree with Saul’s criticism of Haslanger and believe that Haslanger is overly concerned with the social hierarchy. Namely, her view on race is too strongly imbedded in how people of color are socially situated—she does not account for the embodied experiences of social identities and how subjective embodied experiences also play a role in race and race relations.

In another article on race, Haslanger argues for a descriptivist definition of race that maintains:

A group is *racialized* (in context *C*) iff its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in *C*) and the group is ‘marked’ as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region.¹⁴

In other words, members of group are racialized only when members of that group are socially positioned in a way (i.e. privileged or subordinate) that comes as result of one’s observed or imagined bodily features. Jennifer Saul argues that the way Haslanger defines race forces us to say that a person is racialized (e.g. a person is Black or white) only if the person is privileged or subordinated for their real or imagined physical features.¹⁵ The social hierarchy plays a crucial role in Haslanger’s argument, and Saul argues that defining race in this way makes it sound as though someone who is Black may not be considered Black because this person does not take oneself to be systemically subordinated for one’s real or imagined physical features that are designated as “Black”.¹⁶ However, in response to this criticism, Haslanger may say—as she did in separate article while distinguishing her definition of race from Alcoff’s preferred concept *ethnorace*—that “races only require that members are similarly positioned structurally in society, whether they want to be or not, *whether they even notice this or not*”.¹⁷ Thus, one does not need

¹⁴ Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Wiley*, vol. 34, no. 1, (2000): 44.

¹⁵ Sally Haslanger and Jennifer Saul, “Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, vol. 80 (2006): 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁷ Sally Haslanger, “Future Genders? Future Races?” *2003-2004 Philosophical Exchange*, no. 34 (2004): 21.

to personally notice that one is socially positioned in a particular way due to one's race. While this definition takes into consideration two issues I personally find important when discussing race: social position and one's observable bodily features and addresses Saul's criticism, this definition fails to account for racial barriers as lived experiences. In my framework, to experience a racial barrier *as a lived experience* an individual involved in the contextual self/Other relationship must—at least in some degree—be aware of one's race and also one's position in the social hierarchy.¹⁸

Haslanger also argues that “races are constituted not by just any social meaning of ‘color’ but, in particular, meanings that situate individuals within a relatively stable social hierarchy”.

Thus, she says:

It follows this view that to eliminate ‘color’ hierarchy is to eliminate races, and this is something we should aim for. However, this is not to recommend genocide! Cultural and non-hierarchical ethnic groups may remain even where there are no race, and terms that now pick out racial groups...may come to pick out non-hierarchical social groups with the same members.¹⁹

While Haslanger's view is interesting, I think Haslanger's approach to eliminate the injustice is too idealistic and *too structural*. She argues that merely by eliminating a color hierarchy in a structural sense, a hierarchy of color would no longer exist. However, our perceptions of race (i.e. the physical features of the body) present us with contextual knowledge because of the historical, social, and cultural factors that are at play when a person sees a racialized body. In other words, I believe no structural changes will change the way people perceive racialized bodies and thus no structural changes can remain just if no changes are made to subjective

¹⁸ If one is not at least in some degree aware of their race or their social positionality, a perceived threat from the look of the Other (what I will argue is a necessary component) does not take effect on the individual—that is, a racial barrier may exist in the context at hand for someone else as a lived experience or as a social structure, but it will not be experienced by the person who is not aware of their social positionality.

It can also be argued that some objects in the world that may possess the “face” of a social structure (and that I will argue in the last chapter are indicative of white supremacy) will not take the same effect on people who are not aware of their race or social positionality. This is not to say these objects do not have the same effect as social structures, but rather, their significance gets overlooked because not as many people are aware of their power and dominance over other people of color.

¹⁹ Sally Haslanger, “Studying While Black: Trust, Opportunity, and Disrespect.” *Du Bois Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2014): 128.

epistemic features of race (i.e. how a racialized body affects one's perception and knowledge). Eliminating a color hierarchy at a structural level may temporarily fix the unjust racial hierarchy, but over time, since the injustice at the individual level (e.g. racial bias, stereotypes) is not addressed, our society would revert back to what it was before (although our society might not sink to the level of injustice that exists now).

Furthermore, this definition that Haslanger presents (as with her other definitions) is more future-oriented—that is, she is concerned about how issues of race are going to play out. She even states, “Ethnicity or ethnorace, if understood as involving both ‘color’ and culture may be helpful in the short-term, but I believe that an ongoing social investment in ‘color’ is harmful”.²⁰ While I understand and sympathize with Haslanger's view, I agree with Alcoff when she says, “visible differences are ‘real’ differences...there is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value”.²¹ The physical and racial characteristics marked on the bodies of individuals play a role in race today, and since my goal for my thesis is not necessarily future oriented—that is, since I am more interested in how race influences our knowledge and experiences today—I believe that Alcoff's definition is helpful for my current project. While we should not heavily rely on color to provide us a framework for talking about race, color plays a significant role in race relations today—society has placed a lot value on the physical, racialized features of the body and I will analyze these practices to provide a framework on racial barriers.

Overall, I believe my thesis on racial barriers would not work well using either definition of race taken from Haslanger. My framework on racial barriers is not intended to solve racial injustice. I am attempting to understand how race and racialized bodies affect people today and affects relationships with others. I am proposing a new way of looking at race relations that relies not only on the structural injustices that play a role in race, but also at the embodied experiences of individuals. I am employing, if you will, a quasi-psychological/quasi-structural approach to understanding race and more specifically racial barriers. Haslanger's approach to understanding

²⁰ Haslanger, “Future Genders? Future Races?” 22.

²¹ Alcoff, “Visible Identities,” 185.

race is overly narrow in a structural sense. I believe that with snippets of writing from Sartre in combination with social psychology literature, I am able to provide the embodied experiences associated with race—which helps explain racial barriers as lived experiences, *and* with the literature on social structures taken from Young, I am also able to account for the structural and hierarchical elements associated with race—which helps explain racial barriers as social structures.

Moving on, I will also use the term “white privilege” throughout my thesis. I will not use the term “white privilege” to merely imply that whites have more rights than people of color or have more freedoms than people of color. To understand white privilege, it is important to know how whites develop more rights and freedoms. Following Naomi Zack, I believe that white privilege emerges from the “lack of opportunity or the lack of access” that nonwhites, especially blacks, experience today *indirectly*. Naomi Zack says, “the exclusion or lack of access is often the result of unequal distribution between whites and nonwhites of opportunities, based on race, socioeconomic position, and race combined with socioeconomic position”.²² Moreover, entitlements, or “gifts for which a person enjoying them doesn’t have to do anything and doesn’t need access to opportunities for inclusion,” are far more likely to be acquired by whites than people of color. This is not to say that there aren’t poor whites or rich people of color—obviously there are.²³ However, the opportunities for people of color to achieve a higher economic status are more limited than those afforded to whites. For example, whites are more likely in the United States to be born into a rich family or more likely to inherit a fortune. I am personally privileged because I was born into a white family that had enough money to pay for my undergraduate degree; in turn, this helps me accrue enough money for my future family and children in order to help them pay for school as well. Thus, white privilege refers to the unequal

²² Naomi Zack, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 11.

²³ *Ibid*, 10.

opportunity for people of color to acquire entitlements like whites—due to the unequal distribution of opportunities, resulting in fewer rights and freedoms.²⁴

Another example of an entitlement—one that many Americans take for granted—is being born an American citizen. I’m not necessarily saying that those of us who were born in the United States have an advantageous position over others who are trying to become American citizens, but rather, people in the United States who may “look like U.S. citizens” have an advantage over those who some may say “do not look like U.S. citizens” (e.g. Latinos, Native Americans, Arabs). Citizenship is more than just a legal or civil process—that is to say, “to feel part of a community is determined not solely by immigration status but also by sentiments influence by social relationships and cultural beliefs and practices”.²⁵ In other words, what a person looks like (i.e. a U.S. citizen) automatically gives some individuals an advantage over others who do not fit a particular ethn racial criteria. While black Americans may experience conflict with the police, people of other ethn races experience this conflict with Border Patrol agents and also with other U.S. citizens who do not accept them as U.S. citizens even if they are in fact U.S. citizens. This conflict with U.S. citizens who look like U.S. citizens makes it difficult for people of certain ethn racial characteristics to get quality jobs, housing, and education.

Another term that I will be using, a term distinct from white privilege, is “white supremacy”. White supremacy is also not to be confused with racism. bell hooks says that the term white supremacy, as opposed to the term racism, “evokes a political world that we can all frame ourselves in relationship to,” it does not only evoke the involvement of white people.²⁶

²⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁵ Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008): 14.

The literature on immigration and citizenship is far more complex. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will not delve into that topic. Citizenship is merely another way in which certain ethn races (e.g. Latinos, Native Americans, and Arabs) have automatically fewer opportunities because of they possess certain ethn racial qualities that do not look American.

²⁶ Sut Jhally, “bell hooks—Cultural Criticism & Transformation” Interview by Sut Jhally. *Media Education Foundation*, 1997, print, <http://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Bell-Hooks-Transcript.pdf>

This is not to say that people of color are responsible for their own collusion in white supremacy. However, bell hooks used the term white supremacy to describe the extensive and pervasive effects of racism on everyone—not just whites. She states that she uses the term white supremacy recognizes “the internalized racism within people of color...[which] was always in a sense keeping things at the level at which whiteness and white people remained

White supremacy is a term that allowed people of color to acknowledge their “collusion with the forces of racism and imperialism”.²⁷ That is, white supremacy not only encompasses the participation of whites, but also the participation of people of color in racial injustice. However, as the term relates to whites, white supremacy is a “racial politic” that causes whites to overlook the ways their race, class, and economic status have a “psychological impact” on them in a racist, sexist, and capitalist state.²⁸ In other words, white supremacy is not only a political or social injustice but it is a lived experience that “shape[s] our consciousness in such a way that our world view differs from those who have a [different] degree of privilege”.²⁹ In other words, one’s white privilege fuels white supremacy. Because white privilege often goes unnoticed and it unconsciously shapes the way whites see and construct U.S. society. If white supremacy also takes place as a lived experience as bell hooks states, we should examine racial barriers not only as a political or social injustice, but also as a lived experience.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the extensive literature on social justice, allow me to briefly note that my theory of *racial justice* is inspired by both by Iris Marion Young’s work on structural justice and Naomi Zack’s work on white privilege. Both philosophers focus on unequal opportunities as the chief issue—it is the foundation on which injustice cultivates and proliferates. Iris Marion Young’s theory of justice asks “whether institutional rules, social practices, and structural relations can be reformed so that they produce less undeserved inequality to begin with”.³⁰ And as I stated before, Zack’s definition of white privilege also takes into account the unequal distribution of opportunities between people of color and whites which sets into motion the unfair advantages of whites over people of color. Along similar lines, my approach to a theory of racial justice examines how the interests of whites and their access to opportunities are supported within institutional rules, social practices,

at the center of the discussion”.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 16.

³⁰ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35.

and structural relations that simultaneously negate the interests of people of color and their access to opportunities.

However, my theory of racial justice is not only concerned with how white privileged infiltrates our society on a structural dimension, it is also concerned with how white privilege infiltrates society on a personal or psychological dimension. In other words, my theory of racial justice is also concerned with how, in bell hooks' view, white supremacy, or the "racial politic" that causes whites to overlook the ways their race, class, and economic status have a "psychological impact" on them in a racist, sexist, and capitalist state.³¹ With the help of some fragments of Jean Paul Sartre's work and psychological research, I will show in this paper that by examining racial barriers as lived experiences and racial barriers as social structures, I believe we can better understand white privilege and white supremacy and its effects on the psychological and structural levels of society in hopes of producing less undeserved inequality between people of color and whites by making people more aware of both types of racial barriers and they affect us.

I will now provide a summary of the central claims I will defend in each chapter and how they contribute to the overall central claim. In the second chapter, I will argue that a racial barrier takes place when a look of the Other is perceived as a threat. However, since I am not fully satisfied with Sartre's view on the self/Other relationship, I argue that by putting only pieces of Sartre's work in dialogue with social psychology literature, a new hybrid theory is able to explain how social identities are reinforced in the racialized self/Other relationship that constitutes racial barriers. Furthermore, with support from Linda Alcoff, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon, I argue that people belonging to different ethnoraces experience threats differently and thus perceive threats differently due to their experiences as a particular ethnorace in the U.S. today. This makes way for the argument I make in chapter 3 which is that the Confederate flag (and other objects) can serve as the face of social structures that are indicative of, and support,

³¹ Sut Jhally, "bell hooks—Cultural Criticism & Transformation" Interview by Sut Jhally. *Media Education Foundation*, 1997, print, <http://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Bell-Hooks-Transcript.pdf>.

white supremacy. In order to this I first argue that the Confederate flag contains the same features of an unjust social structure as articulated by Iris Marion Young. I further argue that the Confederate flag serves as the face of the white Other and emits a threatening look of the Other. In the final chapter I argue that whites possess moral responsibility in the oppression of people of color and that responsibility, when undertaken, should result in the construction and deconstruction of right kinds of racial barriers.

Chapter Overview

Once again, my aim in this paper is to examine the nature and origins of racial barriers. I believe that racial barriers manifest in distinct ways. In Chapter 2, I will describe one type of racial barrier that individuals experience as a lived experience. Drawing fragments from Sartre's literature on the look of the Other and drawing from social psychology literature, I argue that individuals experience these racial barriers with or because of (an)other individual(s). For example, I experienced a racial barrier as a lived experience while at lunch with my aunt because she triggered me to construct one. In Chapter 2, I will provide a more elaborate explanation of the different ways racial barriers as lived experiences are generated for both whites and people of color and why they are generated.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss how racial barriers also exist as social structures. I will employ a definition of social structure put forth by Iris Marion Young. Using Young's framework, I explain how the flying of the Confederate flag is indicative of a racial barrier as a social structure. I chose to focus on the Confederate flag as an example because it has been a "hot topic" or focal point of racial discussion and it is also something that many people may not perceive to be indicative of a social structure.

In my final chapter, I will provide some possible solutions concerning race relations and racial injustice in light of my analysis of racial barriers. I do not intend to provide a complete policy proposal for making this change. Rather, my intent is to provide some examples in order to illustrate how an understanding of racial barriers can be used to provide some insight into how

policy can be change in order to achieve racial justice—that is, my philosophical framework of racial barriers may help illuminate some problems that hinder our country’s ability to attain justice. I will employ Iris Marion Young’s theory of responsibility in order to illustrate my approach to thinking about what whites need to do in regard to racial barriers. I will argue that while there are definitely racial barriers that need to be dismantled, there are also some racial barriers that need to remain intact or need to be constructed in order for whites to become aware of their whiteness and the responsibility they share with people of color to attain racial justice.

Chapter 2: Racial Barriers as Lived Experiences

1. Two African American male co-workers are talking on an elevator on their way to their office floor. These two men, let's name them John and Sam, are very good friends. They're talking about their weekend plans together in what has been called African American English Vernacular, or what George Yancy calls "African American Language".³² In the middle of their conversation, the elevator stops. Two white friends and male co-workers of John and Sam step on to the elevator. Sam tries to carry on their conversation, but John shuts down. He changes his language to what has been called Standard American English and then stops the conversation until the two white men exit the elevator.
2. Tyler and James are two white men discussing their weekend plans as they wait for the elevator to arrive to take them to their office floor. When the elevator doors open, Tyler and James see John and Sam, two African American male co-workers, talking in African American Language. While Tyler and James ride the elevator up to their floor, John and Sam continue talking in their preferred language. James becomes irritated by their vernacular and makes a comment to Tyler expressing his disapproval for African American language in the workplace. James whispers, "Why can't they speak proper English?" to Tyler. Tyler, a person who considers himself committed to anti-racism and also considers James a good friend, finds himself in an uncomfortable situation.

In both of these cases, I argue, people are experiencing racial barriers. On my view, we should understand racial barriers in terms of: (1) lived experiences, or racial barriers that result from a perceived threat from the look of the Other, that causes a change in self-representation; or in terms of (2) social structures, or racial barriers that result from "the accumulated outcomes of

³² George Yancy, "Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of Nommo, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity Through Language," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2004): 273-299.

the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others”.³³ In this chapter, I focus on part (1) of my definition. I will argue that both kinds of racial barriers are the result of: (a) a perceived threat from the look of the Other, (b) living in a society that has an imbalanced power dynamic among people of different ethnicities, and (c) a personal, internal rift. As can be seen in the examples I just provided of racial barriers, these circumstances did not require the existence of racist actions for a racial barrier to emerge. I believe that my description of racial barriers as lived experiences can help people focus on a range of racially-relevant phenomena that we might not regard as “racist actions” on the part of the privileged people in question.

In this chapter I will account for when the look of the Other poses a threat for both whites and when it poses a threat for people of color and how these perceived threats may potentially produce racial barriers as a lived experience.³⁴ I will begin the chapter by describing what a self/other relationship is and how the look of the Other makes way for the construction of a racial barrier. I will apply some components of Jean Paul Sartre’s philosophy of “the Other” to formulate the self/other relationship as it applies in a racialized context (with the help of social psychology literature). I will then include social psychology research on self-representations to

³³ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 62.

³⁴ I will use the phrase “perceived threat” throughout this paper. The reason for this is because while some of the behaviors of others or merely the presence of others may be perceived by some as a threat (while it may not be perceived as a threat by others). I will use this phrase when I discuss racial barriers experienced by all people. When I use the phrase “perceived threat” this is not to say that the threat is not real—it is real to the person involved and that is a subject matter with which I am concerned when discussing racial barriers as lived experiences. In other words, merely perceiving a threat in light of one’s racial identity is sufficient for a racial barrier to take place in the type of society I argue is required.

Furthermore, social psychology research also uses the concept “perceived threat” to talk specifically about the unconscious cognitive responses to specific competing out-groups that trigger negative intergroup biases (Richeson and Sommers 2015). Perceived threats associated with diseases and violence or physical danger, or even perceived threats to the dominant white American culture have been noted to increase racial bias toward specific racial groups (Richeson and Sommers (2015).

However, despite the fact that I believe a perceived threat—regardless of whether or not the threat is justified—still constitutes a racial barrier, it should be noted that I also believe there are some individuals who are not epistemically reliable. In other words, there are individuals who perceive threats where there are no threats. For example, bias police officers are not epistemically reliable because their perceived threats are not justified. However, a person of color who has experienced a situation similar to the “whistling Vivaldi” scenario I will explain later, are epistemically reliable and justified in their perceived threat. While I will not make an argument for differentiating reliable and unreliable perceived threats, I will provide examples of unreliable threats that lead to racial barriers that *need to be dismantled*.

further illustrate how the look of the Other causes one to modify one's self in respect to his or her lived experience as a particular race. Next, I will go on to explain how the different lived experiences of people of color and whites give rise to a different, respective set of self-representations. To do this, I will use Linda Alcoff's work to illustrate the racial barriers experienced by whites. I will also use the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon to illustrate the racial barriers experienced by people of color and why the grounds for which racial barriers emerge for people of color differ from whites.

The self/other relationship I will describe does not apply to all relationships or instances. The self/other relationship that produces a racial barrier is one that is adequately expressed by Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre entertains a rather pessimistic view of self/other relationships in that he believes the Other is not only perceived to be a human but also an object to the onlooker.³⁵ Although this view is one that may not be encouraged to maintain, I believe this view adequately illustrates how some of the most privileged individuals (whites and men) come to view all people—similar to an opponent—someone who is a threat and must be suppressed. My definition of racial barriers does involve Sartre's "look of the Other" and the "threat" that it may generate; however, my definition of racial barriers as lived experiences (as I will further explain later in the chapter) involves a *reconfiguration* of Sartre's view of the self-other relationship that takes into account the imbalanced power dynamics, or the hierarchy and racial privilege, that exists within the society. Also, my view reconfigures Sartre's view by putting in dialogue with social psychology research on self-concept and identity. Thus, I will not be arguing that Sartre's original theory on the self/Other relationship is helpful in my attempt to describe racial barrier. Instead, I will be arguing that Sartre's perspective on the look of the Other and how the look affects a person's behavior in conjunction with social psychology literature on the self-concept and identity together explain the nature of racial barriers and how they function.

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 341. This is a view Sartre borrows from Hegel.

The Look of the Other

As I have mentioned, the way I will describe the look of the Other is inspired by Sartre. However, my view does deviate from his. My interests and goals are not to accurately explain what Sartre means in his work, however, I will use some of his examples and expressions used to describe the Other or the look of the Other. Furthermore, when discussing the look of the Other (that is, the breeding ground for a racial barrier), I will not always be referring to a factual “look”—I use this concept more figuratively, although a threat may transpire from a literal look.³⁶ I define “the look of the Other” as being any kind of social pressure that encourages the modification of one’s behavior *as a result of her ethnorace and where she is situated or positioned within the social hierarchy*.³⁷ The look of the Other, however, is what generates a racial barrier because there is a perceived threat. Alcoff explains that “in the look of the Other we perceive...the Other’s interior life similar to our own. We also perceive our...value and meaning...in the eyes of the Other”.³⁸ Because the look of the Other gives one value and meaning, the look of the Other can either provide one with confidence or insecurity; however, the look of the Other typically stimulates insecurity in the form of a threat. The “threat” to one’s self-proclaimed identity and character varies in degree, and it may occasionally cause one to change her attitude or behavior; however, this is not always the case. One does not need to modify the behavior in order for a racial barrier to emerge; rather, merely the perceived threat is enough to make way for a racial barrier. One can resist the social pressures imposed by individuals and society. The pressure one feels may be a result of the presence of an individual or group, the situation in which one finds oneself, or a direct look of another individual—these pressures affect one’s lived experience.

³⁶ The “look of the Other” is not always a literal glance from another person. A person may experience a “look from the Other”, as I will later argue, merely from being in the same vicinity of another person or even from simply imagining a particular person. I will also show that the look from the Other does not need to be emitted from a specific individual or a real person.

³⁷ An individual may feel pressured to modify one’s behavior as a result of one’s feelings about her ethnorace or as a result of what one thinks others judge one’s ethnorace to be.

³⁸ Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 218.

At first glance, one perceives the Other as an object because at that initial moment, a person is merely confronted with “a certain presence of the other.”³⁹ Simply detecting the Other’s body may elicit a reaction from within the onlooker. The lack of knowledge one has about the Other helps construct the self/other relationship; the Other is a mystery one attempts to solve by trying to “constitute him as a concrete object,” in order to make sense of the world surrounding the onlooker.⁴⁰ These interactions take place among all individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity. For example, walking down the street, I see others and examine and analyze their presence. I “people watch” and try to understand the strangers who are in my vicinity who may pose a threat to my subject hood.⁴¹ I may notice certain characteristics or traits about the individual that help constitute their identity and help me categorize them or make sense of them. For instance, while walking down the street I may notice that there are some people dressed in suits, some dressed in gym attire, some dressed in casual attire. From these characteristics I am able to develop a theory about the individual; what is this person doing here at this point in time? Where are they going? Where are they coming from? While I may try to make sense of the people who surround me—people pose a threat to my identity—there is no way for me to access their thoughts.

At times my look is noticed, and *I* am looked at in response. Although I had originally perceived the Other as an object, the Other stands now as subject, or an autonomous human being, because the Other also sees me. This relationship I have with the Other is rather hostile because we are objectifying one another, yet the Other remains an autonomous, self-conscious being. It is when I find another person staring at me that I become distressed. Simply a look causes me to revert inward, and I begin to analyze myself—I objectify myself. I may make self-modifications to discover and restore my confidence, and reclaim my status as subject. Yet, “[the

³⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 304.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 309.

⁴¹ Sartre believed there is no way for a person to understand the Other (as I will explain shortly), however, I believe we all still *attempt* to understand the Other by means of objectification. One attempts to objectify the Other in order to reclaim her status as subject, but to do that, the onlooker must discover what it takes for the Other to recognize the her as subject.

Other] is a connected system of experiences out of reach”.⁴² This person who looks at me is autonomous, they are free to think what they may about me; however, I have no access to this information. Thus, how am I to respond and maintain my status as subject if I don’t know how I must act to confidently possess that status? If I don’t know what is being thought of me, I have no information to act upon. I may try to act in a way that *I* think will make me subject, or eliminate the objectification I feel, but I may act in a way that makes me come off in the wrong way—as an object to be judged.

As a white woman, when I come into contact with an African American, I want to be perceived as someone who is aware of her white privilege, takes responsibility for the racial disparity that persists in our society, and is willing to take the necessary actions to right the wrongs. However, an African American I pass by on the street will not assume this. They will most likely view me, justifiably so, as a white woman who is not aware of her white privilege and is not an anti-racist. In those few seconds as I pass by this person, I feel pressure to do all that I can to portray myself in a certain way while, simultaneously, feeling like an object. Thus, there is a negation of my experiences as the onlooker in the face of the Other because the Other’s experiences are inaccessible to me. It appears to the onlooker as though the Other “has stolen the world from [her]”.⁴³ Thus, even though the world still exists for the onlooker, it appears as though “everything is transversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object”—this newly decentralized world created by the Other that the onlooker detects undermines the centralized world of the onlooker.⁴⁴ When my world is undermined, my world, my view, my self is threatened with this one “look”.

Even though the presence of the Other undermines my world, I allow for this to happen. I know that the African American passing by me also only has limited knowledge, perception, and experience and cannot access my thoughts, I continue to be preoccupied by what the person

⁴² *Ibid*, 310.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 343.

thinks of me—this person’s world and perception matters a lot to me. The Other instills a sensation of threat because she has concealed information about me, information about me as a white woman. It is a threat to my identity— not a threat to my race necessarily (although for other whites it may be), but a threat to me as a white anti-racist. As a result, there is a feeling of alienation that accompanies the look of the Other. I feel alienated not only from the Other, but I also feel alienated from myself. The look of the Other discredits my own beliefs about myself because it feels to me as though the Other has “a *privileged* perspective over certain truths about one’s self”.⁴⁵ Despite what I know about myself, I favor the perspective the Other has of me, and thus, in a way, I objectify myself while I feel objectified by—or feel threatened by—the look of the Other.⁴⁶

The Look of the Other and Social Identities

Although I find pieces of Sartre’s work helpful in explaining what I mean by “the look of the Other”, Sartre’s illustration lacks clear application in regards to the conditions in which the people live—which is why I do not rely solely or heavily on his work. Sartre does not take into consideration the gender, sexual orientation, economic status, or race of the individuals involved in these self/Other relationships. Because many people who engage in the self/Other relationship as described by Sartre have different degrees of power and influence in the society due to their ethnorace, people of different races are likely to have different interpretations of what a “threat” (via the look of the Other) looks like. While Sartre views the self/other relationship as a struggle to possess one’s title as Subject, social psychologists typically view the self/Other relationship as experiences that modify and refine one’s self-concept.⁴⁷ Thus, the self is said to have a shifting

⁴⁵ Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 68. (Emphasis added)

⁴⁶ One might say that this sounds like white privilege—that is, in the way that I assume a person of color cares about who I am or the kind of person I am. However, I think this comment may further explain why whites experience racial barriers (and probably unjustified racial barriers that stem from unjustified perceived threats). I’m using personal experiences to make sense of why all people experience racial barriers.

⁴⁷ Jennifer A. Richeson and J. Nicole Shelton, “Negotiating Interracial Interactions: Costs, Consequences, and Possibilities.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 16, no. 6 (2007): 317.

nature, developing and emerging around particular *social* encounters and experiences.⁴⁸ This social psychology approach is a more accurate account of self/Other relationships in racialized contexts because it gives rise to real social identities. That is, different self-representations are produced in response to the perceived threat from the look of the Other and these self-representations produced by an individual vary depending on the ethnoracial social context.

Social psychologists have veered away from the idea that one's self-concept is stagnant and definite. To better understand the dynamic self-concept, some social psychologists have coined the term "self-representation" to refer to the cognitive representation(s) one has about one's self. In turn, the many self-representations one has, constructs the individual's self-concept.⁴⁹ The dynamic self-concept is manipulated by the ever-changing self-representations. Research has shown that a person's self-concept is comprised of the many contextual self-representations one has accumulated from different life experiences—one's self concept is comprised of the "collection of images, schemas, conceptions, prototypes, theories, goals, or tasks".⁵⁰ These self-representations are always changing in different respects and depending on the situation at-hand.

Self-representations vary in their origins, degree of influence, and in kind. For example, self-representations may differ in respect to (1) the centrality or importance of the self-representation; (2) whether the self-representation is positive or negative; (3) whether the self-representation is derived from one's current experiences versus one's past or future experiences ;(4) whether one's self-representation is what the self actually is versus what the self would like

⁴⁸ Ziva Kunda and Rasyid Sanitioso, "Motivated Changes in the Self-Concept." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Princeton University, vol. 25, (1988): 272-273.

⁴⁹ Hazel Markus and Elissa Wurf, "The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1987): 300.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 301.

The self-representations with which I am concerned are only those that one develops from social settings. Thus, the "images, schemas, conceptions, prototypes, theories, goals, or tasks" are those that are accumulated from social interactions and social pressures. For example, a goal that may influence one to develop a new self-representation in my framework is a social goal, or a goal one has that takes into consideration another individual or it may be a goal one has in reaction to the presence of a particular individual.

to be, could be, ought to be, or is afraid of being.⁵¹ Consequently, self-representations are either in pursuit or trying to be maintained in all contexts, but they also frequently change from context to context. For example, a student who talks to her teacher she deeply admires will likely change her self-representation to what the self is to what she wants her self to be like. The student's goal is to come off as a smart, innovative, and exceptional student to her teacher, so her self-representation changes to assume the role of being exactly that type of student. Thus, the student devised a self-representation that would best serve her and her goal. However, these self-representations are likely to be different depending on the ethnorace of the individuals involved in the self/Other relationship because their perceptions and goals differ.

In this thesis I claim that a look is perceived as a threat when an experience heightens one's self-consciousness and alters one's self-representation. As I will explain later, one's change in self-representation will always occur if there is perceived threat that manifests itself in a racial barrier. However, it is important to note that people of different races are likely to develop different respective self-representations in response to the threat because people of different races have different judgements about what is considered a threat. With unjust and imbalanced power dynamics that exist between people of different races, what is considered a threat in certain contexts is likely to vary among ethnoraces.⁵²

I previously summarized my perspective (partially inspired by Sartre) on how the look of the Other generates anxiety and a need to reestablish one's status as subject. I will argue in this section, with the help of social psychology research on self-representations that the source of the anxiety provoked from the look of the Other differs depending on the self-representation enacted in order to achieve one's respective goals — consequently, the reason for the anxiety will fluctuate depending on the race of the individual. Furthermore, I will show, using social

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 302.

⁵² Diane M. Mackie, Angela T. Maitner, and Eliot R. Smith, "Intergroup Emotions Theory" in *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*, ed. Todd D. Nelson (New York: Psychology Press, 2016): 149.

psychology research, how the goals an individual holds vary in respect to one's social identity because of the social interactions people have in society.

I will first describe in more detail the nature of self-representations and its relation to the overarching self-concept. The self-concept is malleable and can encompass a wide variety of “possible selves,” such as the good self, the bad self, the hoped-for self, the not-me self, and the ideal self. These possible selves, or self-representations, serve as incentives for behavior because they provide one with future images of the self that are either desirable or undesirable end-states.⁵³ These self-representations occur as a result of “the self-motives being served (e.g. self-enhancement, consistency maintenance, or self-actualization) and on the configuration of the immediate social situation”.⁵⁴ A self-representation is provoked on account of one's own goals and what that a current scenario calls for in order to makes strides toward that goal. Certain contexts call for certain self-representations to manifest and dictate a particular behavior to ensue because one feels anxiety in response to the look of the Other. It has been observed that individuals belonging to a particular social group elicit different respective self-representations because self-representations stem from one's “social status (e.g., majority or minority) within mainstream society and [of one's]...ideas and practices of the cultural context in which they participate...”⁵⁵ A person's goal in her social interactions with others depends on how she is perceived by others, and how her social status is received by others. Thus, the self-representation that one adopts in the midst of a racialized interaction is likely to depend on one's racial identity.

With this being said, it is important to briefly summarize some literature on implicit bias.⁵⁶ It may seem to some that the self-concept literature I have been referencing has little to do with implicit bias, however, the literature on these topics overlap—these topics in psychology

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁵ Stephanie A. Fryberg and Hazel Rose Markus, “On Being American Indian: Current and Possible Selves,” *Self and Identity*, (2003): 326, doi: 10.1080/15298860290106814.

⁵⁶ While there is plenty of research and literature on implicit bias, I merely want to show how the literature on implicit bias plays a role in my framework on racial barriers. Therefore, I will not be including a considerable amount of research on implicit bias—I will simply provide some research I find most valuable for my purposes.

research both overlap when discussing in-group and out-group attitudes. In-group attitudes not only affect the way people treat members of an out-group, but also affect one's self-concept.

Basic

Implicit bias can be understood as the “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner”.⁵⁷ This is to say that although one may be acting with good intentions (i.e. may explicitly express nonracist attitudes and may explicitly disagree with the stereotypes associated with people of color), *implicitly* one may still hold biases (unconsciously). Prior to research on implicit bias, measures of attitude and behavior were measured by self-reported attitudes that did not line up with the glaring disparities that persisted. Implicit bias research revealed: (1) “people’s voluntary reports of their attitudes and behavior may be overly determined by their desire to put their best foot forward” and (2) “while self-reporting their attitudes and behavior people often make a strong distinction between their own personal attitudes and those circulating in the larger culture (“society at large may be prejudiced against Group X, but I am not”).⁵⁸ Contrary to what people have self-reported, Dasgupta states “there is often a great deal of overlap between individuals’ own mental representations of social groups and the mainstream culture’s construal of the same groups”.⁵⁹

While initial research on the nature of implicit bias was focused entirely on attitudes and beliefs held by members of advantaged groups toward disadvantaged groups, this “lopsided research” did not take into account the “unequal distribution of power and resources in the hands of individual who belonged to advantaged groups”.⁶⁰ This is to say that power and status differences between groups are likely to influence how people of particular groups feel about their respective in-group. For example, system justification theory states that people’s intergroup attitudes and behavior may sometimes reflect the tendency to legitimize existing social

⁵⁷ Cheryl Staats, “Understanding Implicit Bias: What Educators Should Know.” *American Educator*, Winter 2015-2016.

⁵⁸ Nilanjana Dasgupta, “Implicit Ingroup Favoritism, Outgroup Favoritism, and Their Behavioral Manifestations”. *Social Justice Research*, vol. 17, no. 2 (June 2004): 145.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 146.

hierarchies even at the expense of personal and group interest”.⁶¹ Research has shown that while “white Americans exhibited strong implicit in-group favoritism, African Americans exhibited *no in-group favoritism* on average, but rather showed much more variability in their implicit interracial attitudes compared to White Americans” even though they showed more *explicit* in-group favoritism than whites.⁶² This research shows “how members of high status or advantaged groups typically exhibit more implicit favoritism toward their in-group and bias against salient out-groups than do members of lower status or disadvantaged groups”.⁶³ As a result, these studies suggest that the implicit biases that members of disadvantaged groups hold “can result in behavior and judgements that are harmful to both the *self* and one’s in-group”.⁶⁴ Thus, as a result of the unequal distribution of power and resources, people of color are likely to adopt unfavorable implicit attitudes toward their self and in-group. As a result, people of color are likely to exhibit different self-representations than whites due to the social hierarchy that is in place. Also, whites are likely to have more intergroup biases because of their implicit in-group favoritism—they have an implicit bias toward their own in-group and thus have a different attitude toward their self, in-group, and out-group than those who are disadvantaged.

In order to illustrate how self/Other relationships in racialized contexts reinforce ethnoracial identities, I will explain how these particular self/Other relationships elicit the expression of particular self-representations because of one’s respective ethnorace. Certain scenarios disclose pertinent information about the self that elicits the activation of particular self-representations. For example, one may activate the self-representation that furthers one’s goal in the moment.⁶⁵ For example, referring back to the example at the beginning of the chapter, the presence of his white co-workers caused John to stop speaking in his preferred and comfortable dialect because the current state of affairs elicited a new self-representation in response to the

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 148.

⁶² *Ibid*, 149.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 162-163.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 162.

⁶⁵ Markus and Wurf, “The Dynamic Self-Concept,” 300.

perceived threat. Simply the existence of two white co-workers cause John to be hyperaware of his race and how he may come off to his co-workers should he continue talking in his preferred vernacular. John may have felt the intimate pressure of his white co-workers to conform to their Standard American English. There was no explicit pressure articulated by the white co-workers, but as a black man who works alongside white men and women, John feels he must act in a particular way to achieve his goals—John may worry about keeping the friendships he has with these white co-workers or may worry about getting along well with these men to further his career or he may worry about reversing the negative stereotypes that many people have toward African American men.

It is John's goals that also contribute to what he may perceive as a threat. One's self-representation fluctuates due to a perceived threat, but this threat is a threat to one's goals. As mentioned previously, one's motivations are predictive of one's self-concept, or one's self-proclaimed identity.⁶⁶ Thus, self/Other relationships make known the social identity of the individuals by way of the source of the anxiety and the nature of the perceived threat; because the perceived threat is a threat to the goals one has as a particular race, the nature of the perceived threat conveys the race of the person who is experiencing the threat. If John's goal is solely to further his career and be a successful black man despite the injustice black people face, then the presence of the white co-workers is a threat to his goals as a black man. John enacts a particular self-representation in hopes of furthering his goals with the help from this self/Other relationship.

As a black man, John has certain self-representations that white people do not have because they do not face those particular forms of oppression, and what was perceived as a threat to John and his identity, did not have to be perceived by anyone else for the racial barrier to emerge. John, due to his experiences as a black man, perceived a threat, creating a racial barrier. Also, the literature on self-representations helps illustrate that John experienced a threat because

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

he is black. Because John is black, he has unique lived experiences within our society that situates him below the average white man, causing him to perceive a threat in the elevator. Thus, what a person perceives as a “threat” is very likely to follow from their lived experience of belonging to a particular ethnorace.

The threatening information about one's self can be understood to be racial stereotypes or negative presumptions about individuals. These negative presumptions do not properly characterize the individual and thus, what accompanies the presence of the Other is a view of the self that challenges one's hoped-for self or ideal self. People of every race fear confirming certain negative stereotypes that accompany that race. For example, a white person and a Latino may engage in a self/Other relationship that causes anxiety for both individuals because they are both concerned about confirming the negative stereotypes associated with their particular ethnorace.⁶⁷ People enter interracial self/Other relationships fearful of confirming negative stereotypes; however, “the stereotype they fear confirming is race- specific”.⁶⁸ In other words, because of the unique experiences belonging to people of different ethnoraces, people of different ethnoraces are likely to experience different sets of self-representations in light of these experiences. While whites are concerned about coming off as “prejudice and unfair”, people of color fear different stereotypes. For example, “Blacks are anxious about appearing unintelligent and incompetent”.⁶⁹ Because people of different ethnoracial groups fear confirming different stereotypes due to their race, “the expressions of intergroup anxiety may be different” because they portray different respective self-representations to overcompensate for or respond to the stereotype.⁷⁰ In other words, people of color (i.e. as opposed to whites) experience different self-representations because their ethnorace has been socially constructed within a society that permits racial oppression and white privilege—this unjust state of affairs has encouraged people

⁶⁷ Heather M. Gray, Wendy Berry Mendes, and Carrigan Denny-Brown, “An In-Group Advantage in Detecting Intergroup Anxiety,” *Psychological Science* 19, no. 12 (December 2008): 1236, doi: 129.108.9.184.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

of color and whites to utilize different sets of self-representations they find most helpful in social contexts. These self-representations thus reinforce their social identities.

A racial barrier is unique to other self/Other relationships or other social identity barriers (i.e. barriers that may exist between people because of gender, sexuality, or class differences) because it requires that racialized people experience a barrier because of their race and because of the race of the Other. While one's ethnorace may be on someone's mind regularly, it is a particularly prominent thought when in the presence of the Other (particularly if the Other belongs to a different ethnorace). As a result of being put in a situation in which one is hyperaware of one's ethnorace, a person utilizes a particular set of self-representations that best suits one in the current social context. In other words, there are specific self-representations that one uses in racialized self/Other relationships and the self-representations. The self-representations one uses are likely to differ from person to person depending on one's ethnorace. Thus, what makes the barrier a *racial* barrier is the unique set of embraced self-representations in response to the look of the Other that differ depending on one's ethnorace.

One's self-representation transforms from being a self-representation one has as subject to a self-representation as object in response to a threat. Thus, racial barriers are the result of the look of the Other because the look, or perceived threat, alters one's current self-representation—a self-representation that necessarily reflects one's lived experience as a particular race. Having different lived experiences not only make the conditions for a perceived threat differ from race to race, but also causes one to adopt his or her race's respective self-representation in response to that threat. The perceived threats are distinct and rely heavily on the lived experiences of individuals that exist because of the current unbalanced power dynamics existing between people of color and whites. Thus, my view of the self/Other relationship actually reinforces social identities. That is to say, these identities that the self/Other relationships reproduce are not merely subjective—they are not merely fabricated in the minds of people. These self/Other

relationships in my framework reinforce real social identities that already exist in the U.S. society.⁷¹

One develops her social identity from the social identity society assigns to her by way of interactions and relationships. It is within these interactions that individuals develop certain self-representations in light of the ethnoracial context. Thus, these ethnoracial contexts may result in a perceived threat from the look of the Other due to one's ethnorace. That is to say, a person's ethnorace is defined by society and this definition, or what it means to be a person of a particular ethnorace, is revealed through interactions and through perceived threats from the Other. One's social identity is accompanied with specific stereotypes, presumptions, and expectations that loom over every individual. It is because of the respective experiences with particular stereotypes, presumptions, and expectations that follow from one's particular ethnorace that one develops different self-representations in response to the threatening look of the Other. These stereotypes, presumptions, and expectations that are given to every individual are developed by the values of the society. Because the U.S. continues to perpetuate the oppression of people of color by tolerating white privilege, the values of our society are biased and the society has devised different stereotypes, presumptions, and expectations for people of different ethnoraces that reflect its biased outlook. These preconceived notions that are attached to racialized individuals are revealed in racial barriers as lived experiences.

White Privilege and Racial Oppression and Their Effects on Racial Barriers

I already discussed how social identities are formed from interdependent relationships that exist within a society. One does not independently develop a sense of social identity; this

⁷¹ The construction of social identities is not a focus in my thesis, but I do touch on this subject to point to my argument that racial barriers are not imagined but real. However, I would like to note that Hegel's account of the self/other relationship and his political philosophy associated with the self/Other relationship also generates the existence of social identities. In her book *Visible Identities*, Alcoff explains that Hegel argued the interdependent relationships that exist among people within a given society are what constitute social identities. Alcoff further explains that, "It is my relations with specific others that constitute my social identity as mother, citizen, worker; these are objective and not merely the product of internal narrativizing or meaning-making". Thus, it is because of the influential interdependent relationships within a society that the shared and subjective meanings confirmed by the society precondition one's internal capacities.

identity is only available to one through interactions within a society that shares a common understanding for meanings and concepts. However, the power dynamics that linger on in our society situate people of color below white(r) people, so a self/other relationship between people of different races, from the get-go, is not an even playing field. Thus, one's social identity is formed, has been attributed with meaning, and categorized based on the common way of living within the society. It does not seem correct for Sartre to imply that the self/other relationship applies to all people because oppressed individuals do not have the same socioeconomic status as the average white man. The self/other relationship has been criticized for being universalized to apply to every self/other relationship.⁷² It must be acknowledged that the self/other relationship that exists between people of different races is a different kind of relationship. The self/Other relationship as it pertains to race and racism is unique in that the people involved are socially placed within a racial hierarchy and have different levels of awareness of their racial identity and consequently how that affects their location within the hierarchy. In other words, because people of color are oppressed, because there is a racial hierarchy, people of color already feel objectified by all white people and by our society as whole—they do not need to engage in this universalized self/other relationship to feel like an object. It appears Sartre was not applying his framework to the perspective of someone who is oppressed, but instead as a white man. Thus, the different lived experiences of people of different ethnoraces, within a society that perpetuates an unbalanced power dynamic among people of different ethnoraces, must be acknowledged to understand the complexity that is a self/Other relationship and the racial barrier that could potentially ensue with a perceived threat from the look of the Other.

The racialized self/Other relationship gets its complexity from the various self-representations vary from context to context, but individuals will develop and become accustomed to enacting particular self-representations that are most pertinent and familiar to use in the given state of affairs. Whites develop certain self-representations in light of the fact that

⁷² Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 70.

they are a privileged race and people of color develop certain self-representations in light of the fact that they are oppressed. People of color and white people generally experience rather different daily lived experiences and thus, enact different self-representations because one's social status and culture are predictive of one's self-representations.⁷³ The self-representations that are employed very regularly due to one's lived experience of a particular ethnorace contribute to the individual's overall self-conception.

One's self-conception consists of three classes: the "actual" self, the "ideal" self, and the "ought" self.⁷⁴ The "ideal" self consists of the self-conceptions that represent the "attributes the person would like to possess," and the "ought" self consists of the self-conceptions that represent the "characteristics that someone, self or other, believes the person should possess".⁷⁵ When there is a discrepancy among these different types of selves, what ensues is discomfort within—a kind of personal strife or an internal rift—something I will argue is always sensed by a person experiencing a racial barrier.⁷⁶ Typically, an internal rift results from a discrepancy between the actual self and the ought self, or, in other words, there is a discrepancy between what a person is actually like and what others think the person ought to be like.

There does not have to be an apparent threat, or racist action, on behalf of the Other for a racial barrier to take place, but as a precaution, the individual puts pressure on oneself to modify their behavior. For example, John, when his white co-workers step on to the elevator, experiences a racial barrier. His white co-workers do nothing visibly to provoke the racial barrier—simply the presence of these men encourages John to protect himself from any

⁷³ Fryberg and Markus, *On Being American Indian*, 326.

⁷⁴ Markus and Wurf, "The Dynamic Self-Concept," 302.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Recall that earlier in the chapter I claimed that there are three components necessary in the construction of a racial barrier: (1) a perceive threat from the look of the Other, (2) living in a society that has an imbalanced power dynamic among people of different ethnoraces, and (3) *a personal, internal rift*. While there are individuals who may not experience the internal rift, this is not to say that racial barriers do not exist in situations they are involved, but these people *themselves* will not experience a *racial barrier as a lived experience*. Those who have adaptive preferences or, as I will explain later, those who have no leeway in their racist beliefs, or those are self-assured non-racists do not experience racial barriers as lived experiences because they do not experience the internal rift.

impending racial barrier between himself and his co-workers that could arise.⁷⁷ John, in this case, experiences a discrepancy between his actual self and his ought self, or in other words, there is a discrepancy between who he is and who he feels he ought to be in front of his white co-workers. It can be seen that a racial barrier can serve as a defense mechanism that protects oneself from a potential threat to one's identity.

A racial barrier is a preemptive tactic to prevent further anxiety from accruing in certain circumstances. In the other example I provided, the white co-worker Tyler experiences a racial barrier as well because he was conflicted—in that particular moment, two of Tyler's self-attributed identities conflicted. Tyler who is a white man and good friends with James, but is also committed to anti-racism does not know which contextual self-representation to express. Tyler does not want to upset James, but he also, did not appreciate his racist comment and feels a sense of duty to say something to James. Even though their co-workers did not hear James's comment, Tyler still feels he should say something. In the end, Tyler says nothing, which consequently builds a racial barrier between himself and his Black co-workers because Tyler feels guilty not saying something and he feels his whiteness and white privilege. In this example, a racist action did occur that prompted Tyler's racial barrier, although this does not always have to be the case. Simply new information received that challenges one's identity is enough to experience an internal rift.

This new information that one receives does not even need to be true. Frequently, when people feel anxious in self/Other relationships, they are anxious because they are creating themselves certain beliefs either about themselves or about others. When people experience an internal rift, there is likely to be a preconceived idea about what the Other thinks of them. These preconceived ideas characterize oneself and the Other in a way that threatens the identity of the individual. Some preconceptions could be: “This person already hates me,” “They think I’m a

⁷⁷ Although I have already argued that social identities get assigned to people through reciprocal relationships with others—and that from these relationships people of color get a sense of who they are by the way people treat them—so John has been preconditioned by society to respond in this way.

criminal,” “She thinks I’m an illegal immigrant,” “He thinks I’m a racist,” etc.⁷⁸ Based on one’s lived experience, one may develop certain preconceived ideas and certain self-representations when coming into contact with another individual of a different ethnorace in order to prepare and protect themselves from experiencing even more devastating threat from occurring, taking into account whether the individual is of a privileged race or is oppressed. A defense mechanism is developed from one’s experiences in which one becomes conditioned to react to certain situations in a certain way.

Many individuals will develop an "ought" self to help protect themselves from others who could potentially criticize their actual self. That is, they employ a particular self-representation to impress another person or to achieve some other end goal. However, those who do not experience racial barriers do not concern themselves with such potential threats to one's identity. These individuals are secure in their ways and have no empathy for others either because they feel they do not need to be empathic or they do not want to be empathetic. These individuals are not empathetic to the experiences of the Other and what that means in terms of their own experiences and identity—thus, they cannot experience an internal rift. For example, whites who are not empathetic toward the experiences of people of color are those who do not understand how their experiences of oppression are linked to the privileges they have as white Americans will not experience racial barriers. I will now provide some examples of whites who do not experience racial barriers and why that is the case.⁷⁹

A White World Devoid of Racial Barriers

Although many whites firmly believe oneself, or one’s character, to be positive and virtuous (even in the face of racial oppression), others do feel guilt and/or responsibility attributed with the oppression of people of color. Therefore, when there is a perceived threat in

⁷⁸ Although sometimes these preconceived beliefs are not always true, I will show later in the chapter that in many cases (particularly when discussing the experiences of people of color) the beliefs they hold about what others think of them is true (e.g. stereotypes).

⁷⁹ I will argue in a subsequent chapter that the instances of whites not experiencing racial barriers hinder our country’s attempts to achieve racial equality.

the look of the Other, the person's self-attributed identity is either challenged (if the person does not have any guilt associated with racial oppression) or one's identity is confirmed (if the person does have guilt). How a white person responds to the look of the Other depends on the preexisting cultural and attitudinal norms of the individual. The cultural and attitudinal norms of a white person are likely to contribute to their not being able to experience racial barriers and to their reaction when confronted with a racial barrier. Any individual who experiences a racial barrier may respond negatively toward the threat perceived from the look of the Other, either in an antagonistic way, in self-contempt, or (for people of color) in self-modification. However, despite the less favorable reactions toward racial barriers, I will argue that racial barriers can be very productive in making strides toward equality. The perceived threat from the look of the Other can be positively received, and what the person can take away from that barrier is a more deeply understood sense of awareness for one's identity and the significant role that identity plays in the process of attaining racial equality. Before I describe the types of racial barriers whites and people of color experience, I will briefly describe the types of whites who are furthest from attaining this type of insight and knowledge, or those who do not experience racial barriers.

The first type of white individual who does not experience racial barriers and are not empathetic are racists.⁸⁰ White people who are racist, or have *no leeway* in their racist beliefs, do *not* experience racial barriers. In order for a racial barrier to emerge within, a white person must perceive a threat that is elicited from within. People who are obstinately racist will not perceive a threat within, they will only perceive a threat outside themselves—the person(s) of color. Racists do not experience an internal rift. The type of racists I am describing do not experience a change in self-representation when approached by a person of color because they will never attempt to look through the eyes of a person of color. These people are firm in their beliefs about themselves, about people of color, and about the relationship between the two. Although I believe people who self-identify as racist do not experience racial barriers, I also believe that

⁸⁰ While it would be argued that most people show some racism, the kind that I am referring to are bigots. They are racist to a different degree than other (non-intentional) racists.

some self-identifying racists do experience racial barriers from within; however, I think this is because as a society, we have made some strides in doubting “not only specific racist institutions or aggressions but also the racialized legitimation narratives of ‘Western civilization’ and the purported superiority of all things European”.⁸¹ “Obstinately racist” people make up a very slim percentage of the population. Alcoff states that there are some societal trends that are contributing to “the turmoil in white subjectivity and embodied existence, and the incoherence of an alienated consciousness, [that] produces a genuine disaffection from white supremacy, even if occurring in confused, inchoate form”.⁸² White supremacy is losing its appeal and influence because so many people are experiencing some sort of racial barrier or internal rift. Even the white supremacists are simply “confused” are experiencing racial barriers and are contributing to the dismantling of the belief system. These people feel a small amount of guilt; somewhere deep inside these racists do not feel completely devoted to their racist beliefs. In order to feel the internal rift, one has to doubt oneself, one’s identity—this is why even some people who self-identify as racist still experience guilt and could be on their way to becoming anti-racist, and why some people who intend to be anti-racist do not experience racial barriers and distance themselves from the cause.

The second type of white person who does not experience a racial barrier is one that intends to be anti-racist, yet she is stubborn and self-assured that she is not racist in any way. These individuals do not question themselves or their behavior rather, they are so convinced they are not racist, they do not reflect on the ways in which they may be acting or thinking contrary to anti-racist practices. Consequently, they will never recognize their white privilege and will never be anti-racist. The third type of white individual who does not experience a racial barrier is one that thoughtlessly says or does racist things in the moment and is never made aware of her offensive and problematic way of thinking. People who do not take into account the lived experience of people of color, or those who are not empathetic, and those who do not

⁸¹ Linda Martín Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?,” *Hypatia* 13 (1998): 6.

⁸² Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 171.

consciously think of their whiteness will not experience racial barriers. One must be somewhat aware of the oppression of people of color or their own racial privilege—this awareness allows for a perceived threat to emerge from within and a change in self-representation to take place. Even some white individuals who engage in white backlash experience racial barriers. These types of individuals also experience a discrepancy between the actual self and the ought self—there is discrepancy between the person (and self that portrays who they currently are) and the person others think she ought to be.

I will now go on to discuss how the social construction of ethnoracial identities has encouraged people to become attached to their cultural and attitudinal norms within the hierarchical society that either benefits or impairs them, and how these experiences make white people and people of color feel inclined to develop distinct self-representations that could potentially inhibit the society's ability to attain racial equality. I will first delve into the more detail about the privileged lived experiences whites have because their racial identity has no societal pressures act any different. Next, I will include the different types of racial barriers a white person may experience as portrayed in Linda Alcoff's work on whiteness and white double consciousness. I will also describe the different types of racial barriers a person of color experiences with the help of W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

White Privilege and White Double Consciousness

Alcoff states that when in self-other relationship, a person feels that the Other has a privileged perspective over oneself. Even though white people do not experience the sensations that accompanies racial oppression, when a white person engages in a self-other relationship with a person of color, the white person does not possess the privilege—especially if the look of the Other inspires “guilt, accusation, and moral deficiency”.⁸³ A white person may feel threatened by the Other's privileged perspective because it feels as though the Other sees something in the person that she cannot see in herself, and as a result, there is a “subsequent alienation of one's

⁸³ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 218.

own self". Alcoff argues that these individuals experience white double consciousness. White double consciousness is not simply the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of both the dominant and nondominant, but also recognizing that the nondominant lens is a "critical corrective truth".⁸⁴ When a white person experiences white double consciousness they are experiencing an internal racial barrier. To acknowledge that the nondominant Other has a true and negative view of oneself can be debilitating to a privileged white person. When a white person becomes aware of the fact that one's own situated perspective and knowledge has been "infected by white supremacy, one's own sense of identity becomes invalidated".⁸⁵ After living a life for so long in "disillusionment with these white vanguard narratives" and taking all of one's privileged perspectives as given, a white person could react in different ways that result in a racial barrier. However, how a white person reacts to such information, or reacts to the racial barrier, depends on the person's cultural and attitudinal predispositions one develops because she is of a privileged race.

I will first describe the prospective cultural and attitudinal norms a socially identified white person may portray in our hierarchical society in which white people experience racial privilege, and how these cultural and attitudinal norms influence a white person develop different self-representations (that may prime one to enact contextual racial barriers). A white person's cultural and attitudinal norms that develops as a corollary to one's white identity and white privilege influences how she engages in the racialized self/Other relationship—it affects how threatening the look of the Other is to the white person. One's attachment to her whiteness is reflected in her cultural and attitudinal norms. The amount of anxiety a white person may experience depends a lot on how attached the person is to her white identity.⁸⁶ Those who are

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 139.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 206.

⁸⁶ The degree in which a white person is "attached" to her white identity can be measured in a variety of ways. I will discuss shortly different ways to think about attachment to whiteness and how it is manifested in attitudes and behaviors.

Social psychologists have also measured in different ways how socially advantaged groups show attachments to their social identities and their social group. Social psychologists have measured implicit in-group favoritism (Brewer 1999), intergroup bias (Brewer 1999, Dovidio & Gaertner 2010), social categorization (Fiske

attached to their white identity, or are furthest from becoming a "white traitor," are those who experience the most anxiety. However, as I have already stated, those who are even further from becoming an anti-racist are those who do not experience racial barriers.

Linda Alcoff provides in her work examples of both whites who are not attached to their white identity and those who are much attached. For example, Alcoff mentions Jack Kerouac, a white American male novelist, who documented his experiences walking down the streets of Denver. In this casual moment, he experienced a revelation—he became aware of his whiteness. However, Jack felt he was “outside of ‘white society’ or positioned on its margins. He thought of himself as having the aesthetic sensibility and temporal orientation of the other-than-white in his irreverent cynicism toward the white world’s self-presentations and declared intentions”.⁸⁷ Jack is clearly not a white person who is attached to his whiteness. Contrarily, Alcoff quotes another experience had by a white man named Edward H. Peeples in which another white individual became "furious" with him, for he had "betrayed her precious 'white race'".⁸⁸ When Peeples went to a newsstand to purchase an African American newspaper, the cashier told him, "You don't want this paper; it's the colored newspaper." Peeples responded, loudly enough for others in the shop to hear, "You must think I'm white."⁸⁹ In this instance, the white cashier is very attached to her whiteness and finds Peeples's act of white treason to be unacceptable. Kerouac and the newsstand cashier both perceived a threat to their white identity from the look of the Other; however, they reacted very differently. Although, both individuals experienced racial barriers, the self-representations that were enacted were different—they felt they had to portray different kinds of "self" in response to the threat. I will provide instances in which white individuals either experience more intense anxiety from the look of the Other (often resulting in backlash), and

1998), self-categorization (Hogg & Williams, 2000), and social belongingness (Park & Baumeister 2015) and have shown how these different forms of measurement lead to harmful biases, stereotypes, and prejudices toward people of particular racial groups all of which could potentially lead to discrimination and injustice (Macrae & Bodenhausen 2000).

⁸⁷ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 186.

⁸⁸ Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," 17.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

instances in which whites do not experience a racial barrier at all. Both reactions to the perceived threat from the look of the Other are usually due to the white privilege the individuals experience (often unknowingly) and how they were raised—the cultural and attitudinal norms of white individuals living in a society that tolerates white privilege radically dictate how the individual will respond to a threat to their white identity.

One reason why whites are attached to their whiteness is because some may actually view themselves as being loyal or prideful of their ancestry, not their race. There are individuals who are very attached to their family's culture and ancestry—a culture and ancestry that is racially white. Some European Americans (e.g. the Irish and Italian communities) continue to pledge their loyalty to their ancestry and their culture in a variety of ways. Many will say their own families faced prejudice and they were not slave owners as if this absolves them of responsibility for the oppression of people of color.⁹⁰ However, it is important to point out that the prejudice some European Americans faced and the loyalty these European Americans share are different from those of people of color.⁹¹ While the European American's ancestors faced prejudice, the ancestors of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans had their lands stolen and their people enslaved all to benefit the wealth of the country.⁹² Additionally, because “race and ethnicity do not map onto the same kinds of identifying practices,” the Europeans who faced prejudice were able to “blend into the European American melting pot...because their racial identity as Irish and Jewish did not operate exclusively or primarily through visible markers on the body so much as through contextual factors such as neighborhood and accent”.⁹³ Thus, Alcoff argues, “Whiteness affected [the European American's] life options even before it became an official category...This is just to say that whiteness then was not too different from

⁹⁰ This is not to say that whites should not be proud of their ancestry—in fact, Alcoff argues that it is healthy for whites to have a positive sense of self (Linda Alcoff, *What Should White People Do?*, 2001). However, when one's positive sense of self provides one with unjustified reason to not feel responsible for the oppression of people of color, this is an attachment to whiteness that is not conducive to racial equality.

⁹¹ Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 257.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

what whiteness is now".⁹⁴ People who are loyal to their European ancestry and history and reject the American history as their own are not being fully aware of their white privilege they continue to benefit from, even if their ancestors faced prejudice. It is also these types of individuals who experience more anxiety or feel more threatened from the look of the Other. These people's family history gets disparaged and as a result they feel their identity is attacked and threatened. Thus, the ethnicity of these people and how they were raised have largely contributed to their attachment to their white identity. This attachment to one's ancestry is one reason why a white person is not able to evaluate the ways in which their race continues to oppress people of color from an unbiased standpoint.

Another reason why white people are attached to their white identity is because a white person cannot experience racial oppression. This claim may seem like an obvious epistemological fact; however, because a white person cannot understand what it is like to be a person of color, the cultural and attitudinal norms of most whites only further deteriorate their empathy. A white person's lived experience is not a corollary of racism or racial oppression, consequently, it can be inferred that a white person has no self-representation that is derived in response to that experience. People of color derive their identity from the fact that they and their ancestors faced racism, discrimination, or slavery. However, because a white person is not racially oppressed and their ancestors were not racially oppressed, a white person may not feel her whiteness. The unjust status quo is not criticized by white people because they are not being oppressed—they continue to benefit unknowingly. Because there is no circumstance that calls for the change in self-representation, a white person in racialized contexts acts no different because the societal norms continue to sanction the benefits white people receive. White people have never known what true equality requires and have never had to relinquish their privilege and power in order to achieve true equality. Thus, what is privilege and power to a white person appears to be equality because it is the normative workings within the society that have persisted

⁹⁴ Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 18.

for so long. Whites continue to accept the privileges they are bestowed because they don't view it as privilege. Because whites have not personally experienced racial discrimination socially or structurally, they are unable to understand that they benefit from the discrimination that others face. Thus, while people of color are primed to develop certain self-representations in racialized contexts, white people's self-representations in the face of racism and oppression do not change because the instance does not contradict, or threaten, their self-concept. The white person's self-representation becomes further reinforced, they become "so well-rehearsed they have become automatic"—it becomes automatic to think in a privileged way without being aware that is privileged.⁹⁵ However, when the white privileged perspective gets called into question, the white person does develop a new, defensive self-representation—when this occurs white people feel threatened because their identity and their knowledge has been challenged.

Many whites in the U.S. are unaware of current issues of race and racism because they are too uncomfortable to engage in a discussion about race and racism—they have become conditioned to develop white fragility. However, these individuals who avoid these conversations are uncomfortable because they are experiencing a racial barrier—which is a step in the right direction because they have become, in some degree, aware of their privilege and the oppression of people of color. Alcott states "the first task of antiracism is for whites to come to understand they are white".⁹⁶ To become aware of one's whiteness is an essential first step. Once a white person has become aware of her whiteness, one is able to experience racial barriers. Though unfortunately, when whites get to this step, they avoid talking and learning about the issues of race and racism and the lived experiences of people of color.

Initially, when whites become aware of their whiteness, or their privilege, they also become aware of the oppression of people of color—as a result, these individuals become overwhelmed with guilt and anxiety. If whites who intend to be anti-racist do not have a proper understanding of what actions and thoughts are offensive and oppressive, then when coming into

⁹⁵ Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 304.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 219.

contact with a person of color, the white person will typically become anxious. The perceived threat is not only coming from the look of the Other, but is also coming from within—they feel pressured to act in the proper way.⁹⁷ Some whites do not understand how or in what ways they are racially privileged nor understand the ways people of color are oppressed, but are aware of the anger and resentment held by many people of color, which in and of itself can make a white person feel guilty. One's limited knowledge in conjunction with one's desire to be anti-racist (or at least one's desire to appear anti-racist) provokes anxiety. A threat will reside within the white person because they impose pressure on themselves to act in a particular way that will make them appear anti-racist and assuage the anxiety or guilt. Thus, whites typically do what they can in the moment for self-preservation; they want to seem like good, anti-racists as they rid themselves of the anxiety and guilt. If whites are able to appear anti-racist or convince others they are anti-racist, their identity and their principles will be salvaged—they will not be called into question. However, not all whites respond to racial barriers in this way—some respond very negatively to toward racial barriers. However, this response is a defense mechanism; it is a way to protect them in the face of race-based stress that they are not accustomed to experiencing in a society that pardons white privilege.

In her work on whiteness and white privilege, Robin DiAngelo, discusses why it is that many whites feel the need to insulate themselves in the face of race-based stress.⁹⁸ DiAngelo has used the term White Fragility, or “lack of racial stamina,” to refer to the consequential condition of whites who live in an “insulated environment of racial protection [that] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress”.⁹⁹ DiAngelo believes white fragility leads to intolerable racial stress that is often expressed in a variety of defensive mechanisms. Because white privilege is exhibited in “a set of

⁹⁷ John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner, “Aversive Racism,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 36 (2004): 4.

Social psychology literature calls such individuals aversive racists because there is a “conflict between whites’ denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about blacks”.

⁹⁸ Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2011), 54.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

[processes and practices] that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination,” whites experience privileges that go unnoticed and are “actually only consistently afforded to white people”.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, whites are not aware of this privilege because most whites live a segregated lifestyle within a society that is white-dominated. Within this segregated life, white people do not feel any loss over the absence of people of color and come to view the objective world solely through their eyes. DiAngelo explains that because “whites are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality,” whites are unable to think about their whiteness as a “state of being” that affects their life and their perspectives.¹⁰¹

As a result of thinking their perspectives are objective, whites become comfortable in their insulated, white dominant bubble that allows for their “objective” white perspective, and they develop their white fragility. However, when in self/Other relationship with a person of color, the white perspective gets called into question because the Other provides an opposing view. This white fragility can cause whites to respond in a variety of negative ways to the perceived threat. There are different avenues of experience in which whites develop their own sense of white fragility. Unique upbringings that develop different attitudes toward certain white cultures, ideas, and values construct these different avenues in which a white person develops her own white fragility. In response to racial barriers, white fragility encourages a variety of reactions from whites to ensue.

One way in which some whites will react to a racial barrier is implementing another self-preservation tactic—something that has been labeled “white backlash” or “white rage”.¹⁰² Recently there have been more instances of white backlash in response to anti-racist activism and movements such as Black Lives Matter. Carol Anderson argues that what triggers such reactions to these movements “is black advancement”.¹⁰³ That is, she argues that whites engage in white

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 59.

¹⁰² Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 3.

rage in response to “blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship”.¹⁰⁴ Or, in the words of Linda Alcoff, the white identity experiences a psychic threat and the white self-esteem begins to crumble.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the more unreceptive one is to the threat, the more intense the threat will seem, resulting in a more hostile response. Some whites respond harshly to anti-racist activism and movements because they perceive such activism as more than just a threat to their body and their way of thinking—it challenges everything they know and everything they believe. Nearly all whites have been taught romanticized versions of our country’s history and our country’s leaders.¹⁰⁶ Whites have been taught to idolize slave owners and racists. These anti-racist movements also call into question the good nature of our country and the military that has fought (and continues to fight) for our freedom. Whites may see anti-racist movements as a dishonor to our country’s ancestors and those who have fought for freedom. Lastly, these movements call into question the morals and principles of one’s white family, their ancestors, their culture. However, the perceived insults or threats against our country’s history and against one’s ancestors affect whites so drastically because whites have an “unconscious sense of racial belonging in U.S. society”.¹⁰⁷

In an article titled "White Fragility," DiAngelo argues that white people are constantly feeling racial belongingness because whiteness is so strongly “embedded in the culture at large”.¹⁰⁸ She states,

Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us—in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of gold himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, whites belong.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Alcoff, Linda Martín, “What Should White People Do?,” *Hypatia* 13 (1998): 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 62.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Because whites feel such a strong sense of belonging in history and in one's culture, whites are also very attached to this identity they have manufactured in their minds. Any threat to this white identity is a threat to (white) U.S. culture and the country's (white) history. Self/Other relationships threaten this identity, and this severe threat to the white identity in tandem with a white's ignorance about the country's current prejudiced and unjust system creates a nearly impenetrable barrier between these whites and people of color. However, even these individuals experience racial barriers—they become hyperaware of their whiteness and they come to realize that their race holds meaning and a responsibility they are not ready to bear or do not believe they have to bear. Today, in response to this threat, whites are engaging in white supremacist demonstrations—like the one that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017.

These individuals who are participating in white supremacist demonstrations are not necessarily the dogmatic racists who cannot experience racial barriers; a large proportion of these individuals have experienced racial barriers, however, their particular attitudinal and cultural predispositions caused them to react to these barriers in a negative way. There are many whites in the country today, although they want racial equality, do not understand all the ways in which white privilege infiltrates their experiences and the ways oppression infiltrates the experiences of people of color. There are also whites who feel that this country has already achieved racial equality and that people of color are asking for too much compensation for the injustice. Although these individuals may not be the type to participate in white supremacist demonstrations, they have similar questions and concerns as white supremacists.

Recently, a black man from Denver named Theo Wilson went undercover as a white supremacist by creating a fake online persona.¹¹⁰ By doing this, Wilson was able to better understand the concerns and beliefs of white supremacists. In the forums for white supremacists, Wilson mentions that people would ask questions such as, “Why can only black people say the

¹¹⁰ Peter Holley, "A black man went undercover online as a white supremacist. This is what he learned." *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/>.

‘N’ word?’” or “How is affirmative action anything other than reverse racism?” or “Why shouldn’t I be proud to be white if someone else is proud to be black?”¹¹¹ Although these questions were posted on a white supremacist website, these questions are asked by whites who do not self-identify as a white supremacists or racists. It is not only white supremacists or racists who do not understand how people of color continue to be oppressed while whites continue to benefit from their white privilege. These questions many whites ask are coming from a place of anxiety. All of these questions concern the freedoms and lives of whites—they feel their identity and their freedoms are being restricted. In response to the “restrictions” or the threats, whites create a racial barrier. The reason these individuals engage in white backlash is because these anti-racist movements actually cause the whites (to some extent) to question their identity, or threaten their own white identity—they to some degree feel guilty even if they do not want to feel that way.

Another way in which whites react to a racial barrier is with self-contempt. Whites who are aware of their racial privilege also create racial barriers because they wallow in guilt and self-contempt. These individuals understand that their experiences, perceptions, and economic status have been affected by their whiteness—all the while reflecting on these privileges, whites become very self-critical.¹¹² These individuals also view themselves through the eyes of people of color; however, rather than rebelling against the perceived threat, they accept the blame and become overwhelmed with guilt. Rather than reflecting on the white anti-racist activists that have fought alongside people of color, these white people dwell on all the wrong doings of their ancestors.¹¹³ Whites who experience this type of racial barrier inhibit their ability to see themselves as anything but a villain responsible for racism. One’s identity is no longer simply threatened but annihilated. When a white person faces the “enormity and depth of racism...one loses one’s sense of self-trust and even self-love”.¹¹⁴ When whites learn the full extent of all the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid*, 8.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

suffering and oppression that existed and continues to exist, they may become locked “in a psychological prison that victimizes and oppresses them every day of their lives”.¹¹⁵ Some whites have truly felt relentless remorse, and it is difficult for them to rebuild their identity on something other than self-loathing. Whites who experience this type of racial barrier are those who “focus on getting acceptance and forgiveness” from people of color.¹¹⁶ Thus, this type of racial barrier may cause whites to become “self-indulgent”—they come fixated on easing their anxiety by searching for acceptance from people of color.¹¹⁷ Whites who do not acknowledge the white traitors to white privilege in our country’s history and build a positive self-image from that information will never be able to contribute to the cause.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, whites who have developed a positive self-image while also acknowledging the “white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation,” will continue to experience racial barriers. However, these racial barriers usually enlighten one on ways that she is privileged, the ways in which people of color are oppressed, and how she can move forward and use that new information to bring about change.¹¹⁹ People who are engaged in a healthy relationship with their ethnoracial identity and are aware of the privileges bestowed to them are able to engage in conversations and debates on race and racism without feeling shame, resentment, or anger. Racial barriers can be a positive experience; they can be a revelation. However, in order to get to that point, whites must accept responsibility for the perpetuation of racial privilege in consequence of accepting the privileges bestowed to them and be constantly aware of their privilege and how it affects their experiences.¹²⁰

Before moving on to the describe the distinct racial barriers experienced by people of color, I would first like to explain that whites may experience racial barriers not necessarily

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 223.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 223.

¹²⁰ I will go further in-depth in explaining in what sense whites are responsible for white privilege and racial oppression in the final chapter.

because they are in contact with a person of color, but because of other whites—that is, the look of the Other is not emanating from the person of color but from a white person. For example, a white anti-racist activist who is disloyal to her whiteness can experience a racial barrier manifesting between her and another white individual. Take for instance the example I provided at the beginning of the chapter where Tyler, a white man, experiences a racial barrier with his white co-worker and friend, James. James’s racist remark makes Tyler feel disconnected from someone of the same race in a situation that is racially-charged. Also, people of color experience racial barriers between one another. For example, Sam, one of the black co-workers in my example, experiences a racial barrier with his black friend and co-worker John because he chooses to end their conversation they were having in their preferred vernacular. Therefore, even though people of the same ethnicity enact a more similar set of self-representations due to sharing more similar lived experiences, there still may be a difference in perception and understanding. People react differently to the perceived threat from the look of the Other and some people may perceive a threat in certain situations while others do not. The different ways people choose to react to such a threat can build a racial barrier between people of the same race.

People of Color and Double Consciousness

Contrary to a white person, a person of color experience racial barriers because they are oppressed. Rather than being ignorant and unaware of one’s racial identity (like white people), people of color tend to be hyperaware of their racial identity as a result of living in the oppressive society we live in. For example, when Alcoff uses Hegel’s approach to the construction of social identities, it can be explained that because of the universal collective interests of the modern U.S. society, what is considered a “dangerous person” limits the freedom and capacities of the average black man. It is from the network of interdependent relationships within a society that the social identity of a black man has been understood to mean something negative. This meaning or stereotype people commonly attributed to black men has not only caused white people to act in particular ways, but also motivates some black men to act in ways

that contradict the stereotype and ease white anxiety. Thus, the look of the Other constitutes one's identity within the society because the look of the Other elevates one's self-consciousness and makes one aware of their social identity in that this identity makes possible the "freedom of action and of decisions".¹²¹ The looks a black man receives may generate anxiety and cause him to be aware of his social identity because he feels his freedom to act is constrained due to his identity—he feels he must act in a way that eases the anxiety of white people. Thus, to tie this information back to social psychology, for black men in particular societal contexts, the look of the Other, in response to the anxiety, elicits a unique self-representation to develop because they are members of a particular social group.

For example, black men are often burdened with stereotype threats that compel them to develop a particular self-representation in response to the look of the Other. Stereotypes have been described as something that hangs over people "as a threat in the air, implying that one false move could get them judged".¹²² In the case of a young African American man named Brent Staples, the people who walked by Brent on the streets of Chicago were obviously frightened of him. The bad stereotype about his race followed him everywhere, threatening him not to act in any way that would confirm the widely held stereotype. Instead of facing the anxiety he experienced when encountering others, he started taking different routes through the city, and he "out of nervousness...whistled popular tunes from the Beatles and Vivaldi's Four Seasons".¹²³ By displaying knowledge about white culture, Brent was able to greatly diminish the amount of anxiety white people experienced passing him on the street. Brent, in response to the look of the Other, felt he had to modify his behavior in order not be judged a "stereotypical" black man. The stereotype was the perceived threat; it is a lingering threat to all black men. Thus, the social identity of people of color is constructed by the Other and is made known to people of color because of these persistent relations they have with whites within a society that situates people of

¹²¹ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 62.

¹²² Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

color below whites. Now that I have broadly explained how privilege and hierarchy as well as one's cultural and attitudinal beliefs have constructed distinct self-representations to manifest within white people as opposed to people of color, I will now provide some examples in which people of color and white people experience racial barriers.

I have described the nature of self/Other relationships and how they are unique within racialized contexts. A threat can be perceived in any self-other relationship; however, threats within a racialized context are different from all others. White privilege and hierarchy are key components of racial barriers, and they explain why people of color experience racial barriers in ways that are different from whites. As a result of routinely being privileged or victimized within our unjust society, people of different ethnoraces interpret threats differently and these threats mean something different with respect to the person's ethnorace. Because people of color and whites have distinct lived experiences in the face of racial oppression and as a result employ distinct self-representations, the racial barriers that are likely to emerge within people of color will be different than those that emerge within a white person. This is because people of color and whites perceive a "threat" in different ways—the potential threats that compromise a white person's identity is different from those that compromise a person of color's identity because of the privilege and hierarchy that exists in our society. What is similar among all racial barrier actors is that they all experience a type of “double consciousness”. However, whites and people of color experience double consciousness in different ways due to the imbalanced power dynamics and the racial hierarchy in place in our country.

Du Bois describes double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others”.¹²⁴ Thus, double consciousness, although it is generated by the existence of another individual, is produced via a perceived threat coming from within the individual. One who experiences a racial barrier as a lived experience essentially undergoes a process of judging oneself in a way she believes the Other is judging her. As a result, the

¹²⁴ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (Dover Publications, 1994), 2.

individual experiences an internal rift. That is, there is a discrepancy between the way an individual views herself and the way the Other views her. As a result, a person of color—because the Other is a white Other—experiences a different type of double consciousness than a white person who experiences the Other as a person of color. Because the Other is different for whites than for people of color, there are different standards and expectations for whites and for people of color—different pressures that accompany the perceived threat from the look of the Other.

In what follows I will employ the work of Du Bois and Frantz Fanon to characterize the racial barriers experienced by people of color and explain why they differ from those experienced by whites. Before I make this argument, however, I will first go into more depth on Du Bois' concept of double consciousness and how the double consciousness of people of color is different from the double consciousness whites experience. Du Bois describes an African American's double consciousness as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity".¹²⁵ Double consciousness thus contributes to the production of an internal rift one experiences in a racial barrier. As previously mentioned, a perceived threat is a necessary condition for producing a racial barrier. However, since the Other's ethnorace is constituted by the ethnorace of the individual experiencing the racial barrier (i.e. since it is the case the when one is constituted by the Other that one acquires a specific social identity), a threat will be perceived differently for people of different ethnoraces. Since there is a different Other for people of color contrasted with whites, the pressures and expectations that accompany the perceived threat are different.

Recall that in the social psychology literature it has been shown that people enact different self-representations when in particular contexts (i.e. when around certain people). That is to say, people modify their goals when in certain contexts—they modify their self-representation to achieve a certain goal in a given context. Thus, when experiencing a racial

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

barrier, there is not only an outward perceived threat (i.e. a perceived threat from the look of the Other) but also a perceived threat that emanates from within. In other words, when people modify their self-representations they are objectifying themselves and eliciting a threat onto themselves. This is the act of double consciousness or the act of “measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world”.¹²⁶

When measuring oneself with the tape of the world, Du Bois’ says that a person of color employs a “second-sight” that allows for one to see the two worlds—the black world and the white world—that are separated by a veil.¹²⁷ This “second-sight” people of color possess is a way of saying that people of color not only see themselves through their own eyes, but also have a second view through the eyes of white people. People of color adopt unique self-representations because of their second-sight that serves as a threat and causes them to experience an internal rift. Due to the second-sight, there is a discrepancy between how people of color come to perceive themselves through the eyes of whites and one’s lived self. As a result, people of color who are not consciously aware that they are looking at themselves through a white lens may exercise much uninformed self-criticism. People of color feel more than just social pressure; they also feel pressure to act “more white” because of their second-sight. For example, in the elevator, John stops talking to Sam when his white co-workers step on the elevator not simply because he is feeling conventional social pressure to conform, but he, as a black man, feels pressured because he is aware of his blackness and sees himself through the eyes of the white men. As a result, John adopts a particular self-representation (like other people of color do) in light of his second-sight. In other words, John perceives a threat from the look of

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Recall that my framework on racial barriers uses self-representations in a social setting. That is, my concern is not with *any* modification in self-representation. I am concerned only with modifications that have been motivated due to social interactions and relationships or social pressures that are brought on by social norms. If one is modifying one’s self-representation in a social context, self-objectification is an essential step. One perceives other people as a threat to one’s identity; so as a result, one is likely to feel a need to modify one’s self-representation in order to convey a different type of person—a type of person to whom one thinks other people will be more receptive.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

the Other—a look of the Other that not only comes from the physical white person in front of him, but also comes from his second-sight.

While white people also have a second sight, or an additional lens from which they are able to generate an idea of how people of color see them, their second sight is different. Recall that Du Bois describes his life as a black man as one that is lived behind a veil, a veil that separates him from the white world. Du Bois explains how this veil “yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” and as a result, he longs “to attain self-conscious manhood”.¹²⁸ But as long as the veil exists, people of color will never achieve self-consciousness because they will always be seeing themselves through the white lens. This differs from the white experience with second sight. White people are not precluded from achieving self-consciousness because of their second sight. As Frantz Fanon stated, “The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level...The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness”.¹²⁹ What I believe Fanon is saying here is that both the black person and the white person are stuck in their own respective worlds—they both in a sense experience this veil. However, when people of color are sealed off in their own world, they are always striving to become more human—which unfortunately is another way of saying they strive to be more white—“For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man”.¹³⁰ Inversely, when whites are sealed off in their own world, they strive to know the world belonging to people of color in attempt to become more human in a different sense.

In the presence of a person of color, Fanon says whites come to recognize to some degree their corrupted-ness.¹³¹ Fanon writes that a friend once told him: ‘The presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little human

¹²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

¹²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 11.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 110.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 128-129.

sustenance”¹³² Recall that Du Bois defines double consciousness as the act of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world. The tape that people of color and whites use to measure themselves is different—that is, people of color are measuring themselves with a white method of measurement and whites are measuring themselves with a person of color’s method of measurement. As a result, people of color feel they need to prove their worth—they need to prove to whites that they should be treated the same way whites are treated (like humans). However, whites feel they fall short in terms of being humane. Whites, when in a self/Other relationship with people of color, come to realize that they are in the wrong; they come to realize on some level (perhaps unconsciously) their privilege and their contributions to the oppression of people of color. Fanon argues that both the black and white man experience a state of neurosis as a result of experiencing a sense of alienated consciousness—or they both experience neurosis as a result of perceiving a threat from the look of the Other.¹³³ However, the person of color and the white person experience different forms of neurosis, or more specifically, the source of the neurosis is different for these groups of individuals.

Fanon notices that the difference of experiences between a person of color and a white person is that for the person of color “the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary”.¹³⁴ Fanon continues, “One can hear the glib remark: The Negro makes himself inferior. But the truth is that he is made inferior”.¹³⁵ This is to say that the world has influenced the person of color to adopt the neurosis they exhibit. Thus, “The negro’s inferiority or superiority complex or his feeling of equality is conscious. These feelings forever chill him. They make his drama. In him there is none of the affective amnesia characteristic of the typical neurotic”.¹³⁶ In other words, people of color are aware of their response to the look of

¹³² *Ibid*, 129.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 138.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 138, footnote.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 149.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 150.

the Other because it was the first encounter with the white Other that oppressed them and made them feel the “whole weight of [their coloredness]”.¹³⁷

The encounter with the Other was not like other self/Other relationships—the racialized self/Other relationship is not merely a psychological experience for the person of color, the experience is an actual, objective oppressive experience that compels people of color to become fully conscious of their situatedness in society. Fanon claims that both Blacks and whites experience neurosis associated with racial relations—he writes, “every neurosis...is the product of...cultural situation. He further adds that this neurosis is the result of “a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly... work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs”.¹³⁸ It is things like books, newspapers, schools, textbooks, advertisements, films and the radio that manipulate one to see the world from a white perspective because the black voices are muffled. Fanon explains that the black person after “having been made inferior, proceeds from humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair”—a result of being oppressed by whites.¹³⁹ Thus, the lived experiences—and the self-representations people of color accumulated—have conditioned people of color to see themselves through the eyes of the white Other.

White people on the other hand are not conscious of their neurosis because the white man is not just the Other but also the master. Thus, because the “the white men...cannot be wrong” their perceptions of the world are construed in the way they want to see it. However, when whites perceive a threat from the Other, their ideal world falls apart. The white person unconsciously recognizes her inhumanness and thus experiences a threat to her identity from the look of the Other. Thus, both people of color and whites have been conditioned to enact particular self-representations due to their ethnorace and where they are positioned in the social hierarchy that was created by whites.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 152, emphasis added.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 60.

Now that I have briefly described the difference between whites and people of color and their experiences of double-consciousness, I will describe some ways in which double-consciousness causes a person of color to experience racial barriers.

When describing double consciousness, Du Bois uses the image of “the veil” to demonstrate how people of color are “shut out from [the white] world”—in other words, people of color feel they are forced to live behind a veil that separates them from the white world.¹⁴⁰ Du Bois further explains that there are some people of color who, after experiencing double-consciousness, desire to either lift the “veil” separating them from the white world or experience contempt toward the white world.¹⁴¹ He states that these two different states of mind are often divided by a very thin line. Since people of color cannot be a part of the white world, Du Bois says that some people of color commonly respond to the situation with a strong desire to be a part of the white world or with contempt toward it. These two contrasting reactions are reactions in response to an internal rift. In his personal experience, when Du Bois first noticed “the shadow” that was cast between him and the white children, he felt contempt toward the white children—he was most pleased with himself when he beat the white children at their own games; however, Du Bois states “the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine”.¹⁴² Du Bois realized that all the contempt was driving him to take away the white children’s opportunities and successes and had detracted time and energy toward projects to further himself and his aspirations. Du Bois explains that people of color may be unaware that the values and principles of whites are different from those upheld by people of color. As a result of being unaware of the veil and also being unaware of their second-sight, people of color become unaware that they are working toward two sets of goals that do not harmonize. Thus, while others tried to creep through that veil or cling to the hatred of the white world, Du Bois

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

found himself working toward his own goal that involved devoting his time to improve conditions for African Americans.¹⁴³

Some people of color may respond the way Du Bois did because they are not aware of how influential one's second sight, or one's double consciousness, are in one's anger or yearning. People of color's awareness of the double-ness in their perspectives produce a feeling of an incomplete self-consciousness. Du Bois attributes this feeling of incompleteness to the double consciousness in which a person of color possess "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body".¹⁴⁴ Du Bois attitude and approach to racism in the United States is the only escape from the "twoness" people of color possess. Without the realization that to "attain [a] place in the world, [one] must be himself, and not another," a person of color cannot escape the feeling of being incomplete.¹⁴⁵ Acting in any of the other two alternative ways, one runs the risk of generating a racial barrier within.

In sum, this chapter argued that a racial barrier takes place when a look of the Other is perceived as a threat. This threat is different in racialized contexts—as compared to all other self/Other relationships—because threats are perceived differently for people belonging to different ethnoraces. The references to social psychology research supports this idea—it claims that unique self-representations are enacted by people of different ethnoraces because they have different goals in mainstream society due to the way they are perceived and how their social status is received by others. Thus, these self/Other relationships actually provide support for the formation of social identities, which helps show that the perceived threat from the look of the Other is not merely an imagined threat—and thus and imagined racial barrier—but the look of the Other gives rise to real racial barriers. I then explained how these racial barriers are experienced by whites as opposed to people of color and explained why it is the case that their social relationships in society have compelled them to construct distinct racial barriers. In the

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

next chapter, I will move on to racial barriers as social structures and argue that social structures also possess this look of the Other.

Chapter 3: Racial Barriers as Social Structures

Ta-Nehisi Coates states:

“In our present time, to express the view of the enslaved...is to remind us that some of our own forefathers once explicitly rejected the republic to which they’d pledged themselves, and dreamed up another country with slavery not merely as a bug, but its very premise. It is to point out that at this late hour, the totems of the empire of slavery—chief among them, its flag—still enjoy an honored place in the homes, and public spaces, of self-professed patriots and vulgar lovers of ‘freedom.’ It is to understand what it means to live in a country that will never apologize for slavery, but will not stop apologizing for the Civil War.”¹⁴⁶

In other words, the Confederate flag is not *merely* an object. Nor is it an object that symbolizes Southern pride or heritage—that is a comfortable narrative. It is what I shall call a white narrative that justifies flying the flag in this country to this day. In this excerpt, Coates describes the flag as the face of white supremacy. It is these white narratives that deny the Civil War was “declared for the cause of expanding ‘African slavery,’” and it is in these white narratives that “history is ignored, and fictions are weaved into our art and politics that dress villainy in martyrdom and transform banditry into chivalry...so strong are these fictions that their emblem, the stars and bars, darkens front porches and state capitol buildings across the land to this day.”¹⁴⁷ These white narratives of the Civil War that are inherently accepted today in tandem with the real reason the Civil War was declared are what embed the face of white supremacy onto the Confederate flag today.

This excerpt from Coates reveals what I shall argue in this chapter: that white supremacy is an ideology that can be reflected and manifested in objects. Furthermore, I argue that these objects serve as the face of social structures that are indicative of, and support white supremacy. While white supremacy appears to be an abstract ideology, I argue that it reveals itself as a social

¹⁴⁶ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), 80.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 64.

structure when it is manifested in material objects. I will ultimately argue that objects like the Confederate flag, for example, take the form of *a racial barrier in the form of a social structure*.

Let me review what I have argued thus far in my thesis. In Chapter 2, I argued that there are three conditions that generate racial barriers: (1) a perceived threat from the look of the Other (understood to be a literal look from another person—frequently of a different ethnorace); (2) living in a society that has imbalanced power dynamics among people of different ethnoraces; and (3) an internal rift.¹⁴⁸ I explain these points in more detail below.

In particular, I argued that racial barriers are the result of the look of the Other. The look of the Other gives one value and meaning, and when perceived as a threat, the look of the Other usually stimulates feelings of anxiety and insecurity. However, this anxiety and insecurity is generated in respect to one's own ethnorace and in respect to the Other's ethnorace. Thus, for a racial barrier to emerge, the perceived threat serves as a social pressure that encourages the modification of one's behavior as a result of her ethnorace and where she is situated or positioned within the social hierarchy. When one engages in self-reflection and modification, one generates new *self-representations*—or the cognitive representation(s) one has about one's self—which help one transform into the type of person they want to come off as.¹⁴⁹ As a result of the social pressure to change the way one behaves or thinks in respect to their ethnoracial identity, one will also experience an internal rift, or an internal discrepancy.

Although in the previous chapter I argued that the look of the Other occurs within direct social relationships—and direct inter-personal contact—I will argue in this chapter that this is not the only form in which racial barriers exist. In fact, they may also take the form of social structures. Importantly, these social structures also have a “look” and “face”; the “look” of a social structure often takes the form of symbols, like the Confederate flag. Furthermore, the symbol of the Confederate flag, because of its inherent meaning, cause people of color,

¹⁴⁸ This is the argument I made in chapter two.

¹⁴⁹ Recall that the concept “self-representation” comes from social psychology research which I argue (in the previous chapter) helps explain how self/Other relationships in my framework of *racial* barriers are unique and distinct from other self/Other relationships that may emerge in other social relationships.

specifically African Americans, to experience an internal rift. They experience a discrepancy between their national identity as an American and their racial identity as an African American—a discrepancy that takes place when the Confederate flag is in sight.

This chapter is organized as follows. I begin by exploring the work of Iris Marion Young in order to explain what I mean by “social structures” and “structural injustice”. Second, once I define these terms I will argue that there exist objects that are the “face” of social structures that constitute the “look” of the Other. Third, after making this argument, I will further argue that these objects are not merely social structures but are *racial barriers as social structures*. In sum, by putting Young’s work in dialogue with Sartre’s, I will be able to show how social structures are themselves lived experiences that can emit a look of the Other.

Young’s View on Social Structures

In the words of Iris Marion Young:¹⁵⁰

Social structures do not constrain in the form of the direct coercion of some individuals over others; they constrain more indirectly and cumulatively as blocking possibilities. Part of the difficulty of seeing structures, moreover, is that we do not experience particular institutions, particular material facts, or particular rules as themselves the source of constraint; the constraint occurs through the joint action of individuals within institutions and given physical conditions as they affect our possibilities.¹⁵¹

In other words, people merely experience the indirect effects of social structures—these indirect effects, or constraints, result from groups of people pursuing their own self-interests.¹⁵² Thus, social structures do not big always have an obvious oppressive effect on certain groups of individuals nor is it obvious how or from where the oppression is produced. Young uses the term

¹⁵⁰ While there are other philosophers (e.g. Marilyn Frye) who could contribute to this section on social structures, for the purposes of this thesis, I will only be discussing Iris Marion Young’s work.

¹⁵¹ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55.

¹⁵² Although Young’s argument for the existence of social structures does not require that people be “pursuing their own interests,” this is an important component of Young’s theory of structural injustice.

social structures to refer to “the accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others”.¹⁵³ Since most people in the United States today are constantly pursuing their own self-interests without any regard to how their actions may result in collateral damage and because these actions are legal and socially acceptable, no one is held responsible if their actions have future ill effects on others. However, not all people have same resources to fulfil their interests. Young argues that the rules and resources available to a person vary depending on one’s socioeconomic position.¹⁵⁴ This is how and at what point injustice infiltrates social structures.

In Young’s view, structural injustice:

Exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.¹⁵⁵

In other words, the rules and resources that define social structures—that are also generally accepted and executed within the inner workings of a social structure—are distributed unevenly.¹⁵⁶ These rules and resources give certain groups the upper hand and thus, while pursuing their own interests, these groups of individuals are adversely affecting the lives of those who have fewer resources. As a result, because these powerful actors in society have fewer rules that apply to them and more resources, it becomes very difficult for those with less to remove themselves from their undesirable situations. Because of the rules and resources that are distributed, some groups of people do not have the same opportunities to fulfill their interests as others.¹⁵⁷ However, as people go about their lives trying to pursue their interests in a socially

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 60.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 59.

¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that structural injustice is not only a function of how many opportunities people have or do not have to pursue their own interests.

acceptable fashion just like everyone else, those who are privileged are not aware of their privilege. They are not aware that they are provided rules and resources that help them gain power and keep them in power. Thus, the drastic imbalanced power dynamics that result from unjust social structures become difficult to change.

That is, the type of society the social structures create is one that will preserve the social structures, and similarly, the social structures will preserve the status quo of the society. Young argues that another feature of a social structure is that it is recursive in nature—it exists in a way that ensures its survival.¹⁵⁸ This makes it even more difficult to dispose of certain unjust social structure. There are some social structures that have played a role in society for such a long period of time that it becomes difficult to shed light on the ways in which it plays a role in social injustice. Some examples of unjust social structures include: (1) the education system, (2) the housing market, and (3) the labor market. These structures obviously play a huge role in our society, and the ways they function are deemed legal and socially acceptable—thus, it becomes difficult to shed light on the unjust elements of the structure and make changes to the way these structures operate. I will show how the Confederate flag operates in the same way as these other unjust social structures.

I have thus far illustrated the complicated, diverse, and pervasive behaviors of social structures. Because the effects of these social structures so pervasive, those responsible for these effects are difficult to “pin down”.¹⁵⁹ This would seem to pose a challenge for my argument that racial barriers can be social structures with a “face,” often taken the form of symbols like the Confederate flag. For in my previous chapter on racial barriers as lived experiences, one person is directly inflicting the oppression or objectification on another person through their literal “look of the Other”. However, I will argue in this next section that the look of the Other can still emanate from social structures, encourage the individual to enact a particular self-representation

¹⁵⁸ Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 60-61.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 104.

and experience an internal rift—thus producing a racial barrier. Before I begin that argument, however, I will first argue why an object like the Confederate flag is a social structure.

In sum, I have shown that Young’s definitions of social structures and structural injustice contain the following features: (1) it consists of masses of people pursuing legal and acceptable self-interests; (2) it has established rules and resources available that are contingent on one’s socioeconomic position; (3) it has a recursive structure; and (4) the injustice is difficult to detect. Together, these features block the possibilities of certain groups of individuals and place these groups under systematic threat of domination. I will now go on to explain how the Confederate flag does just that.

What Does the Confederate Flag Really Stand For?

In this section, I argue that the Confederate flag is the “face” of the social structure of white supremacy. In expressing his fervent disapproval for flying the Confederate flag, Ta-Nehisi Coates states:

Honor is salvageable from a military defeat; much less so from an ideological defeat, and especially one so duly earned in defense of slavery in a country premised on liberty. The fallen Confederacy’s chroniclers grasped this historiographic challenge and, immediately after the war, began erasing all evidence of the crime—that is to say, they began erasing black people—from the written record.¹⁶⁰

In this passage and throughout his book, what Coates finds most appalling about flying of the Confederate flag today is that many people today fail to understand the real reason that the Confederate troops fought against the Union troops—in attempt to “raise a country wholly premised on property” of African Americans.¹⁶¹ After the Civil War, in attempt to cover up their shameful ideologies, Confederate supporters revised the motives of the Confederacy and their reasons for being a part of the Confederacy. Many now believe that the Civil War was fought

¹⁶⁰ Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 73.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

due to the “irreconcilable economic differences between a romantic pastoral South and a capitalistic manufacturing North, or on the hot rhetoric of radical abolitionists.”¹⁶² This new “cover up story” is what Coates calls the comfortable narrative—the comfortable narrative for which the Confederate flag stands.

However, it is not just a comfortable narrative, but a *white* one because, as Coates states, for the Black community, “the Civil War is a story for white people—acted out by white people, on white people’s terms—in which blacks feature strictly as stock characters and props. We are invited to listen, but never truly join the narrative... [for that would] rupture the narrative.”¹⁶³ The underlying white supremacist system of domination seizes control of the story of the Civil War and thus also seizes control of the meaning behind the Confederate flag. The fact that the voices of African Americans—those who were wronged by the Confederacy—are being ignored accurately demonstrates how white supremacy is still prevalent. Thus, not only did the flag *originally* represent an ideology that upheld white supremacy, racism, and slavery, but even today, due to the established comfortable white narrative about the Civil War and the Confederate flag, the flag *continues to* represent white supremacy.

Furthermore, this ideology of white supremacy can easily be understood to be a social structure in the form of the Confederate flag. Recall that Young describes social structures as “the accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others.”¹⁶⁴ That is, the actions of masses of people constrain the possibilities of certain groups of people. The *flying of* the Confederate flag today is an *outcome* of people inherently accepting the comfortable white narrative of the Civil War. These white narratives adversely affect African Americans because they “hinge on erasing [the narratives of] other people, or coloring over disrepute”.¹⁶⁵ However, for many people, particularly white people, the Confederate flag does not affect them—at least not in the same

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁶⁴ Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 62.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 84.

way it adversely affects people of color, specifically African Americans. Thus, many people do not take action against the Confederate flag because it is not a threat to their identity—their white identity. The flag constrains the possibilities of African Americans because it represents a prominent piece of U.S. history that the country chooses to commemorate and exhibit. Since the flag is a largely cherished memento of history—cherished in light of the white narrative—the possibilities of African Americans to disrepute the “honorable” value of the flag is diminished.¹⁶⁶

Let me clarify that the flag is not merely a social structure, but is also an unjust social structure in Young’s view. Young states that what makes a structure unjust is that it puts some groups under threat of domination and deprivation while simultaneously enabling others to dominate. Thus, while it is clear that a particular group of individuals are being dominated (i.e. African Americans), there is also a group that is dominating. The white narrative—the “comfortable narrative”—is not being ignored, or dominated—it is being upheld in the flag. And Coates acknowledges the inherent privilege of the white narrative; he states, “surely the flag’s defenders will proffer other, muddier, interpretations which allow them the luxury of looking away. In this way they honor their ancestors. Cowardice, too, is heritage.”¹⁶⁷ The white narrative is one that gives whites a privilege and a luxury to feel better about their identities and to look away from the tragedies for which their race is responsible. The privilege whites continue to possess by looking away illustrates the ways in which white supremacy, presented here as a social structure, continue to influence our society. And the fact that U.S. continues to fly the Confederate flag—even though the *white* narrative justifies the flying of the Confederate flag and the *real* narrative exposes the flag as being something that represents and upholds white supremacy—shows a unequal power dynamic between whites and African Americans. The white narrative of the Civil War is *dominating* the narrative of African Americans, which is a structural injustice.

¹⁶⁶ Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 73.

¹⁶⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Take Down the Confederate Flag—Now,” *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/take-down-the-confederate-flag-now/396290/>.

I have used Coates to illustrate how the Confederate flag *continues* to symbolize white supremacy—it is a “face” of the unjust social structure of white supremacy.¹⁶⁸ I will revert back to some of the examples and descriptions Sartre uses in his work to explain how the look of the Other applies to social structures.¹⁶⁹ This will enable me to explain how these unjust social structures serve also as racial barriers in my framework.

The Look of the Other and Social Structures

Recall that I describe the “look of the Other” as a process that prompts one to redirect her attention inward to analyze oneself and one’s status in relation to the Other. In developing an account of racial barriers as lived experiences, I have shown that the look of the Other is different in racialized situations. A look is perceived as a threat in virtue of both one’s own ethnorace and the Other’s ethnorace. This threat is also perceived as a racialized threat because of the way in which one feels objectified by this racialized Other.

Here I shall argue that a perceived threat from the look of the Other does not only take place in-person. I will argue this effect—this metaphorical “look”—takes place in unjust social structures as well. In other words, although there may not be a physical look from a particular person, there are systematic processes within our society that impose the same threat on particular individuals—particularly African Americans. I will describe how the presence of oppressive, racist social structures cause African Americans to be aware of, not just how a particular person views them, but how society in general views them. In sum, the other is not a specific person, and the threat is not experienced via a physical look; the Other is masses of individuals, and the threat is experienced via social structures that dominate or deprive people of particular ethnoraces.

¹⁶⁹ Recall that my argument for racial barriers requires a hybrid theory—one that encompasses Sartre’s look of the Other in compatibility with social psychology literature. The social psychology research assists Sartre’s theory in a way that accounts for when the look of the Other creates a *racial* barrier.

One might hesitate to accept this view because the self/Other relationship that I have described thus far seems to suggest that the *physical body* that produces the look of the Other is necessary for the self/Other relationship to develop. However, according to Sartre's idea of the Other, and one's relationship with the Other, "[the Other's] being-there in 'flesh and blood'" is not required.¹⁷⁰ Sartre states, "We do not discover in and through the Other's body the possibility which the Other has of knowing us. This is revealed fundamentally in and through my *being-as-object for the Other*; that is, it is the essential structure of our original relation with the Other."¹⁷¹ In other words, Sartre is saying that the Other's body is not how one initially perceives the Other; initially, one feels objectified and one's thoughts and perceptions get called into question—that is how one originally comes to know the presence of the Other. Thus, the body is perceived subsequently; "The Other's body is for me a secondary structure."¹⁷²

Since the body is not what one originally responds to in the self/Other relationship,—rather, what one responds to is the way the Other makes one feel (i.e. object-like)—it can be seen that a body is *not necessary* for one to feel the presence of the Other. To feel objectified means for Sartre that, in the presence of the Other, one senses a "radical negation of experience, since he [the Other] is the one for whom I am not subject but object," and the radical negation of experience occurs when it appears that the Other "has stolen the world from me."¹⁷³ Although the world still exists for me, I sense that "everything is transversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object."¹⁷⁴ Thus, even though the Other is not present, this feeling of objectification persists, even if Other's existence is not as intrusive as it would be in-person.

However, to clarify how it is the case that the Other has the effect it has on one (that is, even when the Other is not present), Sartre explains, when in the presence of the Other:

¹⁷⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 448.

Recall that I do not intend to argue in favor of Sartre's view on the self/Other relationship. I am merely using pieces of his work on the "look of the Other" to help explain and support my view.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 447.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 446.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 310, 343.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 343.

“I withdraw; I am stripped of my distanceless presence to my world, and I am provided with a distance from the Other...As the Other constitutes me as at six yards from him, it is necessary that he be present to me without distance. Thus within the very experience of my distance from things and from the Other, I experience the distanceless presence of the Other to me.”¹⁷⁵

In other words, the Other appears to me as being “distanceless” because the effects the Other has on me and on my perception of the world are so pervasive. Thus, because the Other appears to me as being “distanceless,” the Other does not appear to me *in the world*. Furthermore, because I perceive the Other as being distanceless, the relationship between myself and the Other “cannot be a relation of exteriority inside the world.”¹⁷⁶ Because the actual relationship one has with the Other is something that is not observable or material in its nature, the self/Other relationship does not require the Other’s body for the effects of the self/Other relationship to ensue within the onlooker. Essentially, what Sartre shows is that because it is *not* the Other’s body that influences one but rather the sensed presence of the Other (that is, the feeling of being objectified) that affects one, the relationship one has with the Other is not something that is exterior, or observable, in the world. Therefore, the physical body of the Other is not required for one to feel the presence within a self/Other relationship.

To prove this point, Sartre provides examples in which the body of the Other is not present, but the presence of the Other is still sensed. For instance, when I step into another person’s house, even if the owner is not there, the house still “reveals to me in its totality the body of its owner.”¹⁷⁷ All parts of the house I know in relation to its owner: “this easy chair is a chair-where-he-sits, this desk is a desk-at-which-he-writes, this window is a window through which there enters the light-which-illuminates-the-objects-which-he-sees.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, even though the owner of the house is not there, he is everywhere.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 360.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 361.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 448.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

In another example, Sartre explains that when receiving a letter from a person living elsewhere, even though the individual is elsewhere, the fact that I received a letter tells me that this person exists somewhere—this, in a sense, is as good as the presence of the person’s body. Sartre states, “It is not only the encounter ...which defines his [the Other’s] contingency and mine;” rather, the contingency of my existence “is given to me as soon as the Other exists for me in the world; the presence or absence of the Other changes nothing.”¹⁷⁹ The Other’s presence in the world, then, does not have to be seen, it just has to exist for the person who senses the Other’s presence.

In sum, there need not be an in-person presence of the Other for the presence to be sensed and to affect the individual. The Other’s presence in these situations is “implicitly contained in the lateral indications of instrumental-things.”¹⁸⁰ Consequently, the fact that a social structure lacks a physical look or a physical body does not impede its ability to serve as a figurative “look” from the Other. In fact, I will prove that unjust social structures (particularly those with symbolic “faces,” like the Confederate flag) affect African Americans in the same way racial barriers as lived experiences affect people of color. Moreover, I will show that social structures, because they are lived experiences, can serve as racial barriers.

How is the Confederate Flag a Racial Barrier?

“The Confederate flag,” Coates writes, “is directly tied to the Confederate cause, and the Confederate cause was white supremacy.”¹⁸¹ In another article Coates says, “that the Confederate flag is the symbol of white supremacists is evidenced by the very words of those who birthed it.”¹⁸² Although the Civil War may not have originally and exclusively been fought over slavery, Coates states, “by 1865, the Civil War had morphed into a war against slavery—the

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 449.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁸¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “What This Cruel War Was Over,” *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/what-this-cruel-war-was-over/396482/>.

¹⁸² Coates, “Take Down the Confederate Flag—Now.”

‘cornerstone’ of Confederate society.”¹⁸³ That is, the Confederacy’s foundation for their dream society was premised on slavery. Thus, it is clear why so many Americans feel the Confederate flag should no longer be flown. I have already argued that the Confederate flag is a social structure; however, now it is my task to prove that it is also a racial barrier.

Recall that when one experiences the look of the Other, one is instructed to reevaluate one’s perceptions and thus poses a threat to one’s identity. When I am in the presence of the Other, I undergo a radical negation of my experiences for the Other exists for me as subject, and I am object. I feel objectified in the sense that I exist for the Other. Similar to how an empty house is suffused with the presence of the owner, the Confederate flag takes on the identity of its owner—the white supremacist. Even though there is not a specific person, or white supremacist, present, the flag gives off the feeling that the owner of the flag exists somewhere in American society.

This is not to say that those who support the flag are white supremacists; however, as Coates writes, when African Americans see the flag, they *sense* the look of the Other—they *feel* the presence of a white supremacist. The white supremacist Other, is revealed to the person of color “fundamentally in and through [one’s] *being-as-object for the Other*.”¹⁸⁴ African Americans experience the contingency of their identities when they see the flag—their oppressed identities and their constricted possibilities become realized. African Americans become aware of their identity and how it is treated today in the face of the flag’s “racial hostility.”¹⁸⁵

In recent news, a Black lawyer from Mississippi named Carlos Moore sued the state for continued use of a flag that contains the Confederate flag design within its own design. In attempt to argue that the flag made him feel stigmatized, he states, “The message in Mississippi’s flag has always been one of *racial hostility* and insult...The state’s continued expression of its message of racial disparagement sends a message to African-American citizens

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Merrit Kennedy, “Supreme Court Rejects Case Over Confederate Emblem On Mississippi Flag,” *The Two Way*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/27/566737228/supreme-court-rejects-case-over-confederate-emblem-on-mississippi-flag>.

of Mississippi that they are *second class citizens*.”¹⁸⁶ Moreover he expressed that “exposure to the flag is, ‘painful, threatening, and offensive.’”¹⁸⁷ As a lawyer who works in a courthouse that displays the flag, he feels his work environment is hostile. I argue Moore perceives a threat from the look of the Other. I believe that Moore’s personal account of how the Confederate flag makes him feel accurately depicts how the Other makes one feel in Sartre’s framework of the self/Other relationship. The flag threatens him on the basis of his racial identity, making him feel like a second-class citizen. As a hostile threat to his identity, the flag causes him emotional pain.

Before I conclude this chapter, I need to interject to say that there are other social structures that can also emit the look of the Other. Some may say that the Confederate flag is an easy example of a racial barrier, so before I move on, I will provide one other example of a racial barrier as a social structure. This example is concerned with drugs and the social structures that are in place to protect and benefit white people while harming people of color. There has been a recent uproar concerning opioid drug users in the United States—the last time drugs were this big of concern was in the 1980s.¹⁸⁸ However, the difference between these two notable events is that one was considered a “drug problem” and the more recent is considered an “opioid epidemic” or “opioid crisis”. One uprising was considered an effect of “a conscious collapse of morals,” the more recent is considered the effect of a disease called addiction.¹⁸⁹ One event affected African American “crackheads” and the more recent affects opioid users or upper-class white people. The opioid epidemic today is being met with empathy, creativity, and heart” while the crack epidemic in the 1980s—an epidemic that “almost exclusively impacted people of color living in poor neighborhoods”—was met with “scorn and punishment”.¹⁹⁰ However, not only

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ Jessie Mechanic, “When A Drug Epidemic Hit White America, Addiction Became A Disease,” *Huffington Post*, July 10, 2017. Accessed May 07, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/when-a-drug-epidemic-hit-white-america-addiction-became_us_5963a588e4b08f5c97d06b9a.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

were Blacks targeted socially for being “crackheads” who were solely responsible for their situation, they were also politically oppressed.

In the 1980s, in response to the crack epidemic, a federal crack statute—known as the 100-to-1 rule—was passed. This law stated that “possessing 5 grams of crack carried the same five-year mandatory minimum sentence as distribution of 500 grams of powder cocaine”.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, crack was the only drug that carried a “mandatory minimum sentence for possession, even for first-time offenders”.¹⁹² The establishment of this law proves that “there were racial factors at play: Crack was cheaper and largely seen as a drug chosen by black people. Cocaine was seen as a white person’s drug and its use occasionally glamorized in the media”.¹⁹³ It wasn’t until 2010 that Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act, “lessening the disparity in mandatory minimum sentences between crack and cocaine charges”.¹⁹⁴ However, by that time, people of color were already disproportionately locked away in the prison system. Instead of helping these people get the help and support they needed to overcome their addictions, people of color were seen as immoral individuals who deserved punishment for their addiction. Not until white people became the victims of drug addiction did society change its perspective.

And then, there is marijuana—a drug that also highlights a structural injustice in the war on drugs. Since having been legalized in seven states, marijuana has supplied well-to-do white men with a great deal of money.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, “there are still thousands of black men in prison for selling marijuana, and others who now bear criminal records that make it incredibly difficult to climb out of the cycle of poverty”.¹⁹⁶ The author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, states:

¹⁹¹ Brittany Hailer, “The Men Who Didn’t Disappear.” *Public Source*, April 26, 2018. Accessed May 07, 2018. <https://projects.publicsource.org/pittsburgh-opioid-epidemic/paul-lee.html>.

¹⁹² “Opinion | 100-to-1 Rule.” *The New York Times*. November 15, 2007. Accessed May 07, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/15/opinion/15thu3.html>.

¹⁹³ Hailer, “The Men Who Didn’t Disappear,” *Public Source*.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Mechanic, “When A Drug Epidemic Hit White America, Addiction Became A Disease,” *Huffington Post*.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Here are white men poised to run big marijuana businesses, dreaming of cashing in big—big money, big businesses selling weed—after 40 years of impoverished black kids getting prison time for selling weed, and their families and futures destroyed. Now, white men are planning to get rich doing precisely the same thing?¹⁹⁷

It is clear that not only are African Americans getting disproportionately *punished* for possession, but also whites are actually *benefitting* from this “war on drugs”. Whites are not nearly getting punished to the same degree as people of color, and they are making a business and earning big money for doing the same thing people in prison are serving time for doing themselves. Furthermore, because of crack epidemic that in no way helped people recover from their addictions, Alexander says that Black men and boys are targeted by racist policies and thrown in jail for first time offenses—an event that will forever live with them because then “they can be discriminated against with regards to “employment, housing, access to education, public benefits. They’re locked into a permanent second-class status for life”.¹⁹⁸ Yet, nothing is done to help these African Americans get back on their feet while now whites who have committed the same offense receive support and rehabilitation. One is marked as a criminal for life and the other is marked a victim of addiction. Alexander also points this out saying that America has a tendency to “shove its racist legacies under the rug rather than own up to them”.¹⁹⁹ For example, after the Civil War ended, “slaves were free on paper but they were left with nothing—‘no 40 acres and a mule, nothing’”.²⁰⁰ In other words, how is the U.S. going to attain equality if laws such as the 100-to-1 rule keep interjecting to perpetuate the already oppressed and disadvantaged people of color with no efforts to conciliate for past damages?

¹⁹⁷ April M. Short, “Legal weed’s race problem: White men get rich, black men stay in prison (Even with legalization, the devastating legacy of the drug war lingers, says Professor Michelle Alexander),” *Salon*, March 14, 2014. Accessed May 07, 2018. https://www.salon.com/2014/03/14/legal_weeds_race_problem_white_men_get_rich_black_men_stay_in_prison_partner/.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

In the example I just provided, one can imagine that laws—such as the 100-to-1 rule—and the social attitudes and economic disparities associated with African American drug use can be seen as unjust social structures that penalize and harm people of color all the while unfairly serving whites. However, even this social structure has a face that emits a look of the Other. As Alexander puts it:

These communities [that experience the most drug use] are poor and have failing schools and have broken rules...not because of *their personal failings* but because *we've declared war on them*...We've spent billions of dollars building prisons and allowing schools to fail. We've decimated these communities by shuttling young people from their underfunded schools to these brand new, high tech prisons. We've begun targeting children in these communities at young ages.²⁰¹

The act of declaring war is clearly a threat. This act of declaring war is clear in the priorities of our social structures. The laws, economic structures, and social attitudes that are in place and treat black drug addicts as criminals bear a face and a threatening look of the Other—a look of the Other that says their drug addiction is not the same as a white person's and does not deserve the same amount of attention and help. A look of the Other that says people of color are second-class citizens. These approaches to drug use are unjust and serve as racial barriers as social structures.

In this chapter I have argued that the Confederate flag qualifies as a social structure and a structural injustice in Young's definition of the terms because the Confederate flag satisfies her requirements for an unjust social structure. Specifically, the flying of the Confederate flag demonstrates: (1) the workings of masses of people pursuing legal and acceptable self-interests even if it means maintaining a status quo that oppresses people of color, (2) the established rules and resources available that are contingent on one's socioeconomic position, or on one's ethnorace, (3) a recursive structure embedded in the flag that keeps it flying, and (4) that the injustice is difficult to identify because it is not objectively obvious to those in power.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, by using the writings of Ta-Nehisi Coates, I showed how the flying of the Confederate flag in the U.S. is merely another avenue of employing white supremacy. In fact, the Confederate flag is a “face” of the social structure of white supremacy. Finally, building upon my analysis in Chapter 2, I have argued that the Confederate flag is a racial barrier (as well as other social structures). Using my Sartrean-inspired definition of racial barriers, I have argued that the Confederate flag emits a *white* look—and particularly a white supremacist look—of a threatening Other for African Americans.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

As a white woman I feel rather uncomfortable discussing “potential solutions” to issues of racism due to the fact that I’m situated in a position of privilege and luxury. The stakes are much higher for people of color than they are for me. However, I am a white person who, in the words of Linda Alcoff, “refuse[s] to perpetuate the practice of white support of or apathy toward the oppression of nonwhite people”.²⁰² Unfortunately, I feel that far too many whites do not share this mindset. This thesis was intended to help whites, including myself, understand their whiteness, how the whiteness affects a white person’s (and person of color’s) way of thinking and behavior, and how it feeds into, and continues to perpetuate, the social structures of our society. Thus, my solutions mostly apply to whites and their responsibilities as the privileged race. I will argue that these responsibilities can be realized in the racial barriers whites experience. All of this is not to say that people of color need assistance in their anti-racism cause, but as a white woman, I feel that many whites feel they have *no* responsibility or they do not understand why they share responsibility with everyone else to attain racial justice.

This final chapter is not entirely a “solutions chapter”—it is more an expansion on my argument that racial barriers should be discussed because they illuminate important information about current racial state of affairs. I will provide some examples in which I will illustrate how an understanding of racial barriers can be used to provide some insight into how policy can be changed in order to achieve racial justice. Both racial barriers as lived experiences and as social structures are important to take into account when considering solutions to racial injustice. I believe racial barriers help illuminate the problems that hinder our country’s ability to attain justice. Understanding racial barriers as lived experiences illuminates the racial tensions between people and why they transpire. Understanding racial barriers as social structures demonstrates how white privilege continues to play a role in structural injustice yet continues to be overlooked. And while some of the racial barriers I have described need to be dismantled, I will

²⁰² Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*, 204.

argue that there are also some that need to remain in order for whites to become aware of the responsibility they share with people of color to attain racial justice.

This chapter is organized as follows. I begin the chapter by explaining what I mean by responsibility (i.e. moral responsibility), a concept inspired by Iris Marion Young, and how this concept of responsibility plays in to my theory of racial justice. Next, using that concept of responsibility, I will explain why it is the case that, in order to achieve racial justice, there are some racial barriers that need to be dismantled, some that need to remain in place, and, in some cases, some that even need to be constructed (where they do not already exist). I will illustrate how different racial barriers serve different functions in society and thus different courses of action must be taken with these different racial barriers in order to achieve racial justice. Lastly, I will provide some examples of ways in which we can use racial barriers to construct new policies.

Young on Responsibility

What does it mean to be responsible? And how does one decide who is responsible for the disparity among people of color and whites (e.g. disparity in quality education, income, housing)? Iris Marion Young argues that discourses on personal responsibility need to account for how the “institutional relations in which we act render us deeply interdependent”.²⁰³ Because we all operate in a system of interdependence, there are aspects on peoples’ situations “that arise from circumstances beyond [their] control”.²⁰⁴ An example Young provides is of a single, poor mother who is close to being evicted because her apartment building was bought by a developer. She tries to find a new apartment she can afford, is close to her work, and is located in a safe neighborhood for her children. The only nicer apartment she can afford is a forty-five minute drive from her work, but the landlord denies her the apartment because she cannot afford to pay the down payment of three months’ rent. Thus, the woman faces impending homelessness.

²⁰³ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 4.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

Young uses this story to show that judging whether or not a circumstance is unjust does not require that we look to one's particular life history, but instead look at the position one is currently in.²⁰⁵ That is, it does not matter how the single mother ended up where she is, what matters is the gridlock she is currently in. Despite her best efforts to get out of the situation—that is, potential homelessness—she is stuck. Thus, it can be seen that there is something fundamentally wrong with this woman's situation. Young says that her “position of being *vulnerable to homelessness or housing deprived*...is a social-structural position”.²⁰⁶ That is to say that her position depends “partly on [her] own actions, partly on luck, and partly on the actions of others”.²⁰⁷ In other words, other people are partly responsible for this single mother's situation.²⁰⁸ While the actions of particular people do not directly contribute to the injustice, what Young argues is that “indirectly, collectively, and cumulatively through the production of structural constraints on the actions of the many and privileged opportunities for some”.²⁰⁹

Many people probably take offense to this view on responsibility proffered by Young, particularly those with power and privilege. Many would say that the privileged individuals are not doing anything wrong—they aren't breaking any laws or intentionally trying to impair the opportunities of the less privileged. While this is true, the problem is not that individuals are intentionally trying to undermine others, rather, the problem is just the opposite—people are not thinking about the unintended consequences of their actions. As a result, these individuals are morally responsible for they are failing to think about something that they could have considered—that is, they could have done otherwise than they did. Young comments that, “most of these actors have their own perceived interests in view... [they] try to be law-abiding and

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁸ Young argues that “The conditions for holding an agent morally responsibly are similar to those of legal responsibility: we must be able to show that they are causally connected to the harm in question and that they acted voluntarily and with sufficient knowledge of the consequences” (Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 97). Citing Peter French, Young further argues that an “agent can be a collective entity, such as a corporation, and when it is, that entity can be treated as a single agent for the purposes of assigning responsibility” (Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 97).

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 96.

decent even as they try to pursue their own interests”.²¹⁰ The problem is that in the process of solely pursuing one’s interests (a privilege many people of color do not have), some people’s opportunities are unfairly restricted while others receive significant benefits and more power to continue exercising their dominance; this is what Young argues is structural injustice.²¹¹ And where there is injustice, there are individuals who intentionally or unintentionally facilitated that injustice.

In order to ameliorate the injustice, Young argues for the application of the social connection model. Young describes the social connection model of responsibility as being a model that finds “all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice”.²¹² However, when Young says particular people are responsible for their actions, this is not to say that they are being blamed, are at fault, or are liable for the outcomes because Young states, “the practice of blaming or finding guilty requires singling out some from others, and applying some sanction against them or requiring compensation from them”.²¹³ Looking for a particular person who is at blame or guilty and requiring them to appropriately compensate for their wrongdoing are backward-looking doings that are not as effective in the long-run at preventing future injustice.²¹⁴ Of course in Young’s model we continue to look for the wrongs in the social structures that cause injustice, however, people who are responsible are simply “participating in the diverse institutional processes that produce structural injustice”.²¹⁵ Thus, the model does not necessarily look at the past and attribute blame to certain individuals; instead, it looks at the injustice that occurred recently, is ongoing, and may persist if our social structures do not change. The point is not to compensate

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 52.

²¹¹ *Ibid*.

²¹² *Ibid*, 96.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 76-77.

²¹⁴ There are works on forward-looking accounts of responsibility for preventing racial injustice. However, for the purposes of this thesis I will solely focus on how Young’s view on moral responsibility fits into my framework of racial barriers.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 105.

for past wrongdoings, but to have individuals contribute to transforming the system for a more just future.²¹⁶

In my theory of racial justice, my aim is similar to that of Young's—that is, my aim is to illustrate how all people who participate in the institutional processes are partly responsible for the racial injustices that continue to exist. My intention is not to make whites feel they are being blamed or to make them feel guilty. I also believe that some people of color can also benefit from this chapter by being made aware of how white supremacy also affects the thoughts and behaviors of people of color; however, my focus is to make whites more aware of how their privilege affects their psychology and their socioeconomic experiences.²¹⁷ Racial barriers exist for people of different ethnicities; however, what perpetuates racial injustices I will argue are the racial barriers that should exist and don't exist and those that should not exist yet continue to exist.

Recall in the introduction that I said my theory of racial justice examines the ways the interests of whites and their access to opportunities are further facilitated within institutional rules, social practices, and structural relations. In other words, my theory of racial justice is concerned with how *white privilege* infiltrates our society both as a psychological, or *introspective*, dimension and as a *structural* dimension in hopes of producing less undeserved inequality between people of color and whites. I will use my theory of racial barriers to help illustrate ways in which white privilege permeates the psychology of an individual and the social structures within society causing racial barriers to either come into existence or cease to exist. I will show how white privilege can either create racial barriers that should not exist or it can prevent a racial barrier from existing where there should be one.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 108.

²¹⁷ bell hooks says she uses the term white supremacy instead of racism because the term encompasses how people of color (not just whites) participate in the system of racial oppression.

Racial Barriers That Need to be Dismantled

The racial barriers that need to be dismantled are those that impede one's ability to act in correspondence with the requirements of racial justice. Some examples of these types of racial barriers include those that exist in situations of white backlash, stereotyping, and uttering racial slurs, just to name a few. Obviously some large scale structural injustices that shape racial barriers also need to be dismantled including those that create the unequal distribution of education, wealth, experience, and merit among people of color and whites. However, as Young has illustrated in her work on structural injustice, such large scale structural injustices often are the result of many smaller scale circumstances out of one's control, but yet, still affect one's life prospects. These circumstances are "traceable to the arrangement of institutional rules, the power that some individuals and groups have within institutions, the way that social processes have become materialized in the built environment, and the cultural habits that people have formed".²¹⁸ Such rules and customs within social and institutional processes cause people of color to experience "overcrowded schools, biased police practices, segregated neighborhoods, few job opportunities for less skilled people, rising costs of higher education".²¹⁹ It is from our country's rules and customs within social and institutional processes that limit options for people of color and creates disparity.

Our country's social structures have come into existence after years of social justice movements and legal reformations—they have been historically produced. Young attributes our country's history to our current unjust social structures:

It is not possible to tell this story of the production and reproduction of structures without reference to the past. The most important reason for the social connection model of responsibility to be concerned with historic injustice is in order to understand present injustice as structural...It is certainly possible to give such a structural account of racial inequality that links current structures

²¹⁸ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 33.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 184.

to the history of slavery, and especially to the aftermath of slavery.²²⁰

Along somewhat similar lines, the racial inequality that still lingers in our society can be seen in the social structures that exist and can be traced to the country's history. While our country's social structures may not explicitly or legally condone segregation or discrimination, the current structures distribute white privileges indirectly by means of smaller scale structural and social processes. While privileges were once directly dispensed to whites and withheld from nonwhites, the current "indirect system remarkably mirrors the prior direct system".²²¹ There is still a disproportionate share of rewards and goods allocated to whites over people of color.

Zack asserts that what perpetuates this white privilege is the fact that so many higher rank positions are filled by whites. She states, "white people hold the majority of its political offices, control most major corporations, fund or run most institutions of higher education, and so forth".²²² In other words, the reason whites continue receiving the rewards and goods that nonwhites are not receiving is because whites in higher ranked positions are those who are distributing privileges to other whites. Thus, "if white people want to do something to mitigate or abolish the injustice of white privilege, they could stop distributing and dispensing these privileges to other white people in their own lives".²²³ Zack states that there are some whites who honestly want to do good for people of color—they are aware of the injustice that prevails. However, the problem is that "the white interlocutors in the discourse of white privilege succeed in becoming subjects when it is a matter of *reflection* and *verbal sharing*, but fail to become subjects in *planning* and *acting* justly, their politeness notwithstanding".²²⁴

However, there are some whites who do not even reflect on or share their privileges because they do not believe they have privilege. Thus, whites who do not acknowledge their privilege and those who do not plan or act justly in light of their privilege are creating racial

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 185.

²²¹ Naomi Zack, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*, 19.

²²² *Ibid*.

²²³ *Ibid*, 20.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 23, *emphasis added*.

barriers that perpetuate racial injustice. A person of color should be able to say to a white person, “you’re coming from a place of privilege” without receiving backlash. This backlash is a response to the perceived threat from the look of the Other—it is a response to the uncomfortable feelings associated with a racial barrier. A racial barrier between these individuals should not exist—that is, a white person shouldn’t feel uncomfortable or irritated with such a remark. A white person should already have familiarity of their racial privilege and have accepted it; they should not label or perceive a person of color as a threat when they dare to point out a white person’s privilege. White privilege—a term that has to do with people of color and the rights of people of color that have been violated where the rights of whites are protected—is a term that whites take personally. White privilege is a real issue that negatively affects people of color, yet whites get offended and defensive when they hear they come from a place of privilege. The only way for a racial barrier to stop forming in these types of circumstances is for whites to learn what white privilege means, how it operates in society, and accept that they possess it. Once a white person is able to accept that she has white privilege, she is more likely to reflect on the ways her privilege has affected her personal experiences. Once accepting her white privilege, a white person is also more inclined to engage in dialogue with people of color on white privilege instead of discounting their views—something that results in a racial barrier. Discounting a person of color’s views merely another way of objectifying the Other in response to a perceived threat. While accepting white privilege is essential to dismantling some racial barriers, as Zack points out, a white person also must act in accordance with her knowledge of white privilege.

To conclude my section on racial barriers that need to be dismantled, I will discuss the racial barriers experienced by people of color. It is not my intention to educate people of color on how to deal with racial barriers. Rather, my hope is to contribute to a conversation with people of color on how this problem of racial barriers can be dealt with. After all, I do not have a concrete plan as to how people of color should react should they experience a racial barrier. However, since I believe that people of color should not experience racial barriers *with whites*—not in just society anyway—, if a person of color *does* experience a racial barrier in the presence of

someone white, I believe the first step is for the person of color to identify the racial barrier, or to recognize that what they are experiencing is a racial barrier. Then, once the first step has been taken, I believe a person of color should then decipher why she is experiencing a racial barrier—in other words, what was it about the experience that made one perceive the threat from the look of the Other? Once a person of color can answer this question, I believe she will come to realize that there is no reason for her to be experiencing a racial barrier—instead, the white person should be the person experiencing the racial barrier. I believe that once a person of color becomes aware of the racial barriers she experiences—and the sources of those barriers—she will be less susceptible to the threatening look of the white Other in similar future situations.

Racial Barriers That Must Remain

I believe that in hopes of achieving racial justice, it is required that certain types of racial barriers be constructed or live on. It is better for society that whites continue to experience certain types of racial barriers. It is unlikely that race categories will cease to exist, and if they do, it will not be any time soon. Because “the weight of too much history is sedimented in these marked bodies with inscriptions that are very deep,” whites need to remain entirely aware of their racial privilege and the oppression of people of color—and thus, they need to experience racial barriers.²²⁵ It may seem strange to say that some racial barriers need to be constructed or need to remain; however, due to our country’s state of affairs, there needs to be a barrier that forces whites to reflect on their privilege and acknowledge that they will never be able to understand what it means or how it feels to be a person of color living in the United States. Experiencing racial barriers, the kind that I argue need to stay up or need to form, come as a result of taking responsibility for transforming the ways in which people of color continue to be used and oppressed. Taking responsibility for transforming institutional and social structures requires reflecting on one’s own positionality and how one has contributed to the injustice in the past. Young states:

²²⁵ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 222.

Those who are beneficiaries of racialized structures with unjust outcomes, however, can properly be called to a special moral and political responsibility to recognize our privilege, to acknowledge its continuities with historical injustice and to act on an obligation to work on transforming the institutions that offer this privilege, even if this means worsening one's own conditions and opportunities compared to what they would have been.²²⁶

Applying this specifically to issues of race and racism, we can interpret Young as arguing that those who benefit from unjust racialized structures ought to recognize their privilege that has come about as a result of our country's history in order to make changes in these unjust structures no matter the cost. What I argue is that there are some racial barriers that need to remain intact or be constructed in order for people of privilege to recognize their privilege. Some kinds of racial barriers are inherently racial barriers as a result of recognizing one's privilege.

Recognizing one's privilege forces one to objectify oneself or to critique oneself from a different perspective—from a person of color's perspective. Young points out that to take responsibility for one's actions, a person needs to think about how one's actions affects others:

A more realistic understanding of being responsible, one that better matches what most people think, might go something like this: a responsible person tries to deliberate about options before acting, makes choices that seem to be the best for all affected, and worries about how the consequences of his or her action may adversely affect others.²²⁷

This can be applied in a racialized context. That is, when going about one's day, a white American ought to be responsible in that they ought to think about the ways in which their experiences and circumstances are privileged and how that privilege enriches their opportunities

²²⁶ Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 187.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

At this point in her book, Young is drawing a contrast with the "could have done otherwise" model of moral responsibility. Despite that "few people in their sober moments" actually agree with the opposing definition of personal responsibility, the rhetoric on personal responsibility is influenced by public discourse of welfare which maintains that "being a responsible citizen means simply and entirely that one avoids dependence on others".

when compared to people of color who lack those privileges. This is not to say that whites should feel guilty, but they should be aware of that privilege and reflect on how they benefit from those privileges. Thus, when in certain contexts, white people will more likely become aware of their own whiteness, white ignorance, and white privilege—doing so forces them to remain humble in light of their epistemological shortcomings. Said whites would engage in self-modification in certain racialized contexts because they are encouraged to “check their privilege”. That is, whites should self-create a racial barrier—that is how a white person should act responsibly in light of the racial injustice that exists.

A white person cannot relate to the experiences of people of color when they come from a place of privilege, and thus, there needs to be certain barriers that respect the different lived experiences, cultures, and histories of different ethnoraces. People of color have acquired unique cultures, histories, stories, and experiences that have at least partially come about because they were discriminated against and marginalized in this country—these cultures and ways of living were developed in hopes of preserving their humanity in times of distress.²²⁸ Certain genres of music, dancing styles, clothing, and hair styles are some examples where people of color have had the freedom to express themselves while being oppressed in this country. Some individuals appropriate the culture of people of different ethnoraces because it is trendy and they do not realize that the aspect of culture being appropriated is valuable and meaningful in that culture. Moreover, it is usually whites who are appropriating the culture and making it trendy and are doing so without giving credit to the culture of inspiration. For example, last year Gucci’s runway show for its Cruise 2018 collection starred some nearly identical pieces that were originally created in the 1980’s and 1990’s by African American fashion designer Daniel Day (also known as Dapper Dan). The brand did not give credit to Day until after others began publicly making the connection on social media.²²⁹ There should be a barrier protecting the

²²⁸ Tommy Curry. “I’m Too Real For Yah: Krumpin’ as a Culturalogical Exploration of Black Aesthetic Submergence,” *Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 12, no. 1-2 (2009): 65.

²²⁹ Faith Cummings, “Gucci, Dapper Dan, and How the Fashion Industry Fails Black People,” *Teen Vogue*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/gucci-dapper-dan-cultural-appropriation>.

culture of people of color. That is, whites should feel anxiety from the look of the Other when considering appropriating another culture. They should feel that anxiety because they know that it is wrong for a white person of privilege to appropriate a culture that has been oppressed by whites to earn a profit or earn publicity.

Many of those who tend to run the risk of appropriating the culture of people of color tend to be those who are ignorant about their privilege. Ignorance exists for different reasons. There are those who are self-assured non racists or people who do not feel they need to recognize their privilege because they are “definitely not racist”. As a result, these individuals do not experience a racial barrier in unjust racialized situations. There are also people who say they are colorblind. These individuals, because they proclaim to be colorblind, are incapable of acknowledging their privilege.

Thus far I have shown how there are some racial barriers that do need to be destroyed while there are some that need to be constructed or remain intact. In order to respect the cultural, historical, political, and experiential differences of people of color, there needs to be some white boundaries—boundaries that force whites to acknowledge their privilege and respect the cultural differences of people of color. In other words, whites need to experience racial barriers as lived experiences. Whites who experience these types of racial barriers feel anxiety because they are in some degree aware of their privilege and how many people of color have had to go about their lives without any such privileges.

Examples and Solutions

Young’s theory of justice “consists in a shared responsibility that all members of a society have to redress structural injustice by dint of the fact that they contribute by their action to its production and reproduction”.²³⁰ I too believe that for an extensive reformation to ensue, many people need to take action and take responsibility for the ways in which their actions

²³⁰Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 173.

contribute to the racial injustice. This being the difficult pursuit that it is, there are some things that individuals can do on a day-to-day basis to help transform the injustice—things that can be changed in light of what we have learned about racial barriers as lived experiences. There are also some things that can be done—in light of what we have learned about racial barriers as social structures—on a larger scale to help facilitate racial justice at the institutional and social level.

Discussions about race are essential for any white person to become aware of her privilege. Although I agree with Zack that whites need to do more than just reflect, they must *act* as well, I believe that reflecting on one's privilege is an essential first step. It is a step that many whites have not taken yet. Discussing topics of racial injustice and white privilege force whites to take a step back and look at their lives from another person's point of view. It is only then that whites are able to experience the right kinds of racial barriers. Thus, in order for whites to become more aware of their white privilege, they must engage in the uncomfortable conversations on race and privilege. Those who have reflected on their privilege and are trying to take action can take action by challenging friends and family about their views on racism and white privilege. One can even take action by doing research on the ways people of color continue to face injustice—this type of research helps one develop knowledge on all the ways one is privileged and helps one become more aware of their privilege in certain situations. Also, whites should not be hesitant to participate in organizations that promote racial justice. White students attending a university should participate in organizations such as the Black Student Union, African Student Union, League of United Latin American Citizens, or the Women of Color Coalition in order to better understand the experiences of people of color and to understand the forms of injustice they face.

However, beyond providing organizations on campus for students, universities should require students to take a course on race and gender issues. Requiring a course on race and gender issues would expose many individuals to conversations on such topics. There are many individuals who feel very uncomfortable talking about race need to get more exposure to the

conversation on race. Also, many believe that such conversations are too taboo or are not important, thus, requiring students to take a course would introduce them to conversations on race and help them avoid being blissfully ignorant on racial issues. Not having conversations about racial injustice and white privilege encourages and perpetuates the unpleasantness whites feel toward the topic. Engaging in open dialogues with people about race will ease the anxiety whites feel because they will no longer be completely ignorant about the topic of race.

These courses on race and gender should be even more efficient if they were offered throughout grade school as well. Many white children (and white adults) are completely unaware of their white privilege. White children are never exposed to the fact that they are privileged. I personally grew up completely ignorant of the fact that my skin color bestowed me with privilege, despite the fact that I was born and raised in a city where whites are the minority and Latinos are the dominant ethnorace. I was not exposed to the hard truth about my privilege until college when I voluntarily registered for a class titled “Philosophy of Race and Racism”. White children need to be made aware of their privilege and should be able to talk about racial issues before college.

The conversations on racial injustice and white privilege are essential in our country’s attempts to attain justice. One way to get people to start talking about race is for people (both people of color and whites) to continue raising concerns and questions about the way things are. People need to challenge the status quo and bring attention to the ways people of color continue to be oppressed. Of course, people of color have been doing this for far too long; perhaps it’s time for a larger community of whites to assist in the efforts and stand behind and support people of color.

It’s when these racial barriers as lived experiences are manifested as social structures that racial barriers become even more dangerous and unjust. Instances of white backlash, racist remarks, behaviors, and propaganda, and stereotype threats compromise racial justice. Young argues that we must recognize “that the state’s power to promote justice depends to a significant

extent on the active support of its citizens in that endeavor”.²³¹ Thus, if most whites are not active anti-racism activists, then a large proportion of society is not interested in changing the status quo; as a result, significant changes will not ensue. Also, as Naomi Zack points out, whites need to start taking *action*. Whites need to stop handing out privileges to other white people. Opportunities need to be given to people of color—they should receive the same opportunities to receive equal education, housing, and jobs as whites. Being in a position of privilege, or a position in which one’s actions detrimentally impact the lives of the less privileged, one ought to act responsibly and justly.

This thesis has sought to explore new ways of understanding racial barriers in a clear philosophical framework. I believe that people in general, but really whites specifically, need to try to be more aware of how racial barriers affect them in their daily lives. Racial barriers not only affect people of different ethnoraces on an individual level but they also affect people differently at a structural level—that is, people of different ethnoraces perceive threats in different contexts. Understanding why people of different ethnoraces perceive threats differently and in different contexts is helpful, particularly for whites, to become self-aware and understand their thoughts and emotions. A person’s white privilege and personal experiences—those that are upheld and not questioned in the structural processes in society—help illuminate why it is so difficult to detect racial barriers as real and not merely imagined. One of the problems that permeates our country is that whites are not aware of the negative forces working against people of color (i.e. white supremacy) and thus do not experience racial barriers in the appropriate moments; however, when a white person’s identity gets called into question or gets threatened, they create racial barriers that should not exist. I believe that understanding the complicated structures of different racial barriers can be helpful for whites to understand their responsibility in achieving racial justice and what actions need to be taken.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 169.

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Vita

Kayla Mehl is an M.A. student in philosophy at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). She is graduating May 2018 and will be continuing her education in philosophy at the University of Washington; she will begin the PhD program at University of Washington in fall 2018. Her areas of interest include: philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, Black feminist philosophy, social and political philosophy, phenomenology, and epistemology.

As a master's student, Kayla has had the opportunity to present her work in two conferences. She presented her paper "Contemporary Challenges and Solutions to Established Feminist Philosophies on Race and Gender," at The 8th Annual Women's History Month Conference held at the University of Texas at El Paso in April of 2017. Later that year, she also presented her paper "A Feminist Critique: The Education of Children in Latinx Communities," at Asociación de Filosofía y liberación (the Philosophy of Liberation Conference) in Mexico.

Also during her time as a mater's student at UTEP, Kayla became involved in Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands. She taught at both Rayito De Sol Daycare and Austin High School in El Paso, Texas. During this time, she also worked (every semester) as a Teaching Assistant at UTEP for an Ethics course and for Introduction to Philosophy courses.

Aside from teaching, Kayla has also been involved in UTEP organizations, research labs, and has worked with a non-profit organization as a writing intern. As an undergrad and graduate student, she has worked in the psychology lab at UTEP as a volunteer and as a researcher. She worked alongside graduate students who were researching the effects of implicit bias on students. Kayla has also been involved with the Black Student Union at UTEP to be more involved with a community who shares her same values. She was also successfully completed a program at UTEP called the Law School Preparation Institute where she learned what it takes to be a law student and a successful lawyer. More recently, Kayla worked as an intern writer for a non-profit organization called The Borgen Project. During her time as an intern, she published more than twenty articles for both the The Borgen Project blog and Borgen Magazine.