2024

Ideals of Benevolence, Acts of Dysconsciousness: White Women's Pursuit of Diversity in Nonprofits

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Recommended Citation

IDEALS OF BENEVOLENCE, ACTS OF DYSCONCIOUSNESS: WHITE WOMEN'S
PURSUIT OF DIVERSITY IN NONPROFITS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of

Antioch University Seattle

In partial fulfillment for the degree

of DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

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August 2024

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This dissertation, by Tessa A. Fulmer, has
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Antioch University Seattle
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

IDEALS OF BENEVOLENCE, ACTS OF DYSCONCIOUSNESS: WHITE WOMEN'S
PURSUIT OF DIVERSITY IN NONPROFITS

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Recent political movements such as the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have
brought renewed attention to the social roles of White women and their unique position of
intersectional privilege and oppression. White women experience the benefits of whiteness
while simultaneously experiencing the gendered oppression of womanhood. However, there is
a lack of research exploring how White women conceptualize and respond to their own
positionality as both White individuals and as women. This study utilizes constructivist
grounded theory to examine how White women navigate their social location within the
context of working in the nonprofit sector, a space wherein White women are overrepresented
and often in close contact with various elements of systemic oppression. The analysis revealed
that White women view nonprofit organizations as protected spaces that allow them to foster
careers without encountering overt sexism. However, White women also believe that
nonprofits are fragile and easily threatened by external pressures. They seek to protect these
spaces by maintaining a homogenous culture that aligns with White womanhood. They view
increasing diversity as simultaneously aligned with their personal and organizational values
and threatening to the organization's culture and internal stability. As a result, White women
engage in a variety of maneuvers that serve to symbolically pursue diversity without altering
the fundamental culture of the organization. These maneuvers allow White women to see

themselves as benevolent and values driven, while also maintaining their systemic power over People of Color. The findings offer insight into the role White women play in maintaining systems of racial oppression in response to their own fears of gender-based oppression, and guide recommendations for further intersectional deconstruction of oppressive systems. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: gender, privilege, race, white women, whiteness, women

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the family, friends, and mentors who guided and supported me through this process. To my partner, Thom, and our dog, Hugo, thank you for listening to my ramblings, pumping me up when I felt overwhelmed, and sometimes reminding me to have a much-needed snack. To my family and friends, thank you for always being ready with encouragement or to commiserate. I could not have done this without every one of you. Finally, I want to thank my committee, Dr. Bergkamp, Dr. Kennedy, and Dr. Heckler for guiding me gently, but firmly from nervous student into a fully-fledged researcher and clinician. You are all inspiring and I hope to continue following in your footsteps.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous body of scholarship upon which my dissertation rests. Without the pioneering work of Black feminist scholars, particularly, Joyce King, bell hooks, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, I could not have done the work I did in this dissertation. Their tireless pursuit of justice and liberation has crafted and honed the tools I used here, and I hope that my efforts here can contribute to dismantling the oppressive systems of power that bind us all.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has prompted a surge in popular awareness of systemic racism in the United States in recent years (Badenhorst, 2021; Griffin, 2021; Nuru & Arendt, 2019). Simultaneously, an increasingly misogynistic political environment and the #MeToo movement have reinvigorated public interest in women's issues (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Cossens & Jackson, 2020). This combination has focused new attention on the social roles of White women and their unique position at an intersection of privilege and oppression. White women experience the benefits of whiteness and simultaneously experience the gendered oppression of womanhood. Although scholars have described the behaviors of White women in multiracial spaces, the emphasis has typically been placed on the effects their behavior has on people of Color (POC; Badenhorst, 2021; Bauer, 2021; Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Nuru & Arendt, 2019). Some recent work also addresses ways in which White women reckon with their White privilege, but it does not address the countervailing aspect of gender oppression (Bosco, 2019; Brown, 2019). There is a lack of research exploring how White women conceptualize and respond to their own positionality as both White individuals and also as women.

Additionally, much of the current research has been conducted with participants who are actively engaged in anti-racism work (Bosco, 2019; Krejci, 2007). Participants in these studies are intentionally, regularly engaged in reflecting on issues of privilege and oppression outside the context of the studies. This research captures the effects of individual privilege awareness on White people, but it does little to explore the feedback loop that exists between individual experiences of privilege and oppression and the structures those individuals participate in.

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are one space where individual social location comes into contact with systemic oppression. NPOs, particularly those that serve communities of Color, frequently maintain racist and sexist status quos within both the communities they serve and the NPOs themselves (Griffin, 2021; Heckler, 2019; Iyer & Achia, 2021; Ojeda & Wall, 2023). Furthermore, women are overrepresented in the NPO sector, making up about 75% of NPO workers, while representing less than 50% of employed individuals in the United States (American Association of University Women, 2018). As a result, NPOs may create environments that highlight the tension between privilege and oppression that White women experience without directly addressing that tension.

Research Questions

- How do White women working in NPOs conceptualize their social location?

- How do they respond to tension between racial privilege and gender oppression?

- How does the NPO work environment affect their conceptualization and responses?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Rationale

This study used a grounded theory approach, the details of which are discussed in the methodology section. However, it is important to mention the impact of grounded theory on the literature review process. Grounded theory aims to develop a theory based on deep analysis of field data, which requires the minimization of pre-conceived ideas on the topics being researched (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). Towards this end, grounded theorists typically complete all or most of the literature review after analyzing data to prevent biasing their analysis and to better address topics that unexpectedly arose throughout the process (Dunne, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 2006). This approach is insufficient in many formal research settings, however, because a literature review is often necessary to obtain approval to proceed with research (Dunne, 2011).

To address these conflicting needs Dunne (2011) recommends a middle of the road approach to literature review that occurs in two stages. In the first stage, the researcher seeks to identify relevant gaps in literature associated with their topics of interest and to sensitize themselves to existing theories related to those topics. This stage is complete when the researcher believes they have reached a sufficient level of theoretical sensitization. Theoretical sensitization is reached when the researcher is sufficiently familiar with the themes, language, and fundamental concepts within their area of interest to discuss them competently with participants, but not so inundated that the researcher becomes "numb to possible unhelpful preconceptions" (Dunne, 2011, p. 116). The second stage, which is often integrated into the discussion section of a paper, is completed after data analysis is completed and serves to bolster the grounded theory by situating specific themes within existing literature in a more

nuanced fashion (Dunne, 2011). This two-stage method informed my inclusion and exclusion criteria for my literature review and allowed me to clearly identify areas of focus within the expansive topics of social justice, racial identity, gender identity, and nonprofit work (Dunne, 2011; Hempel, 2020). It also allowed me to communicate more effectively with participants, conduct deeper levels of data analysis, and better identify my own and participants preconceptions (Dunne, 2011).

Due to the vast quantity of academic literature on race and gender that spans multiple fields of study including psychology, education, sociology, and economics, I restricted my literature review to focus on developing sensitivity towards specific elements of my research questions (Hempel, 2020). I included research that speaks to the development of White racial identity, conceptualizations of womanhood, and the specific experiences of White women with regards to race and gender. Topics regarding the impact of White privilege on marginalized groups and the effects of misogyny and patriarchal values on men, while important and valuable, do not directly inform my understanding of White women's identities and therefore are not included. Furthermore, I positioned my exploration of White women's identities within the context of nonprofit organizations in the United States. Thus, I limited my examination of nonprofit work environments and social dynamics to American settings. Finally, since my research question presumes complex dynamics of social privilege and power, I provided a brief overview of terms and key concepts that inform social privilege research.

A Note on Class

Race, gender, and class are closely linked and often overlapping concepts in American society (Schuller, 2021; Zinn, 2009). Unfortunately, the social sciences rarely directly discuss

issues of social class overtly, much less their complex interactions with race and gender (Wilkerson, 2020). As a result, although class is implicit in literature regarding whiteness and, to a lesser extent, womanhood, it is too obscured to provide useful context regarding my research questions. Research on nonprofit organizations addresses class more overtly and relevant insights are presented in alignment with the previously stated rationale.

Social Privilege and Power

Defining Privilege

Social privilege and its corollary, oppression, were first discussed in detail by W. E. B. Du Bois in the early 1900s (Du Bois, 2014). He noted that White laborers had access to resources and power that their Black counterparts did not solely on the basis of race. Almost a century later Peggy McIntosh expanded on this premise using the metaphor of the "invisible knapsack" to describe the often-unrecognized benefits that White men received as a result of their birth (McIntosh, 2019). As scholarship regarding social privilege and its relationship to power blossomed in the following decades, a concise definition of social privilege emerged. Black and Stone (2005), after a significant review of literature on the topic, define social privilege as "any entitlement, sanction, power, immunity, and advantage or right granted or conferred by the dominant group to a person or group solely by birthright membership in prescribed identities" (p. 245). This definition clearly identifies that social privilege is based on socially constructed identities over which the individual has little to no control and that those privileges are unearned by those who receive them (Black & Stone, 2005; DiAngelo, 2016). Black and Stone (2005) also note that the benefits of privilege come at the expense of other individuals or groups and that those who have privilege are often unaware of the privileges they hold.

Discussing Identity

Social privilege is conferred based on aspects of a person's identity, so it is important to discuss what constitutes identity in privilege literature. Hays (2016) identifies discrete aspects of identity using the acronym ADDRESSING to indicate: age, disability (developmental), disability (acquired), religion, ethnicity and race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous status, nationality, and gender (including gender orientation). These categories are chosen based on their significance to existing power structures, are socially constructed definitions, and are relative immutability (Black & Stone, 2005; Hays, 2016). Notably, they exclude socially relevant categories that individuals can alter with relative ease, such as job titles, community roles, and certifications (Hays, 2016; Nieto & Boyer, 2006). Each of these individual categories is called an identity domain and when multiple identity domains are considered together, they describe a person's social location (Hays, 2016). To distinguish whether a person holds a socially privileged or oppressed position in a specific identity domain this study uses the language of Nieto and Boyer (2006). When a person holds privilege in an identity domain they are referred to as an agent, and when they do not hold privilege in domain they are referred to as a target (Nieto & Boyer, 2006). Individuals can, and typically do, have a combination of agent and target distinctions across the social location. For instance, a White woman is an agent in the racial identity domain and a target in the gender identity domain because White is a privileged identity and woman is an oppressed identity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a layered term that can be used to describe nuances in privilege and social location and can also represent a scholarly lens for critical analysis. The scholarly

development and application of intersectional theory is discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter. Here, intersectionality is introduced as a means of conceptualizing overlapping identities of privilege and oppression. Intersectionality initially referred to the overlapping oppression of holding multiple target identities in the domains of gender and race, although it has since expanded to include additional identity domain, as well as a variety of intersections involving agent identities (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019). It is important to recognize that intersectionality was born out of the lived experiences of Black women within the feminist movements of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s seeking to better articulate the nuanced differences between the experiences of three differently oppressed groups: White women, Black women, and Black men (hooks, 2014). This foundation situates intersectionality firmly within a context of challenging privilege and power and demands that the interplay of identity and power be both explicit and multi-axial (Cho et al., 2013; hooks, 2014). In terms of social location, this means recognizing the ways that individual identity domains combine to result in different experiences of oppression. For example, a White woman's experience of gender-based oppression would likely be different from a Black woman's because a Black woman would also experience racial oppression at the same time (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Power and Oppression

Discussions of privilege are inextricably linked to complex networks of power and oppression and as such it is necessary to distinguish between individualized and systemic levels of operation. Power associated with social location is maintained through covert and overt systems including legal, economic, political, and social components (Black & Stone, 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Since these systems are constructed and maintained by

individuals and often reflect cultural beliefs, it can be difficult to distinguish whether an event is taking place on the individual, cultural, or systemic level. Shiao and Woody (2021) analyze these distinctions in terms of racism but provide terminology that can be generalized to address other identity domains. Drawing heavily on the work of Bonilla-Silva, they identify racism in three categories: attitudes, cultural schema, and structure. Attitudes of racism or prejudice are defined as an individual's negative perceptions of target groups and a belief that the agent identity is superior to the target identity. Cultural schemas refer to broader cultural depictions of a target group in media and public contexts.

Finally, Shiao and Woody (2021) use the term structural racism or oppression to describe the ways in which the status quo and existing systems of power perpetuate existing inequality and maintain dominance for the privileged group. However, the term *systemic* oppression is more common in the literature and is therefore the term used in this paper (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; DiAngelo, 2016; Shiao & Woody, 2021). Due to the expansive and interlocking nature of systems, systemic oppression is often more difficult to recognize than prejudicial attitudes or cultural schemas, while also having the capacity to harm large numbers of targets (DiAngelo, 2016). Systemic oppression is also notable in that it can be carried out by individuals who do not personally espouse prejudicial beliefs, but are working within an oppressive system (DiAngelo, 2016; Matias, 2016).

Dysconsciousness

As noted above, privilege and power often remain unrecognized by those who hold them (Black & Stone, 2005; DiAngelo, 2016; McIntosh, 2019). At times, this lack of recognition is due to lack of awareness based in the person's immersion in a culture that does not often challenge them on the basis of their identity (DiAngelo, 2016). However, King

(1991) also identifies a cognitive mechanism of uncritical consciousness that allows those with privilege to avoid the discomfort of recognizing their complicity in oppressing others. She terms this form of consciousness, dysconsciousness, in order to differentiate it from unconsciousness and critical consciousness. Dysconsciousness is characterized by an awareness of inequity combined with an uncritical acceptance of the status quo (p. 135). Importantly, unlike a complete unconsciousness to dynamics of privilege and power, which is unaware of inequity, dysconsciousness must be maintained by either avoiding ethical judgements regarding known inequity in the status quo or by rationalizing them (Bergkamp et al., 2022; King, 1991). Dysconscious maneuvers can take many forms, but they are united in their aim to redirect awareness away from challenging the power and privilege of agents or suggesting substantive alternatives to the status quo while also maintaining the emotional comfort of agents (King, 1991).

Overview

Social privilege and power are interrelated, but distinct concepts within the literature. Privilege describes the specific benefits an individual gains based on their social location. Power instead focuses on an individual's or group's ability to manipulate the existing status quo with relative ease. Furthermore, interactions of privilege and power are affected by intersecting target and agent identities within the same individual in ways that can fundamentally change a person's experiences of oppression. Both concepts, power and privilege, are framed as a dichotomy of have or have not, and the power of agent groups is predicated on the oppression of target groups at individual, cultural, and systemic levels. It is often challenging for those with privilege to identify and address privilege and power at all levels due to the psychic discomfort associated with acknowledging their complicity in and benefit from an inequitable status quo.

Agents often engage in an array of dysconscious maneuvers to avoid fully engaging with this discomfort.

<div align="center">**Whiteness and Identity**</div>

Whiteness as a Culture

Due to its designation as the culture of the dominant group, White culture is frequently presumed to be a cultural blank slate against which other cultures and racial practices are compared (Sue, 2004). This process renders its own values and beliefs invisible, and it is only in recent years that scholars have begun identifying the qualities that define whiteness. White values often serve to maintain White racial supremacy by justifying or avoiding the examination of hierarchical power structures (Chen, 2017). These include beliefs in meritocracy, the inherent inferiority of some groups, investment in masking or ignoring disparities, and a belief that it is the "superior" group's moral duty to "save" and assimilate other groups (Bauer, 2021; Putman, 2017; Sue, 2004). White culture also values indirect conflict and the avoidance of psychological discomfort (Matias, 2016). It is important to note that White cultural values are tightly embedded into American society and are often perceived as universal rather than racially coded (Chen, 2017; Sue, 2004). When these beliefs are held uncritically, they result in substantial harm to a variety of marginalized groups and can produce significant defensiveness in White individuals when questioned (Bauer, 2021; Helms, 2014; Matias, 2016; Putman, 2017).

Racial Identity Development

Although whiteness often goes unacknowledged, White people can develop an awareness of their own racial identity and the privilege it entails. Helms' White Racial Identity Theory, Ponterotto's Racial Consciousness Development Model, and Bennett's Model of

Intercultural Sensitivity all speak to this process using a developmental framework (Bergkamp et al., 2022).

These models all follow a similar flow from complete unawareness, through some period of defensiveness, and end in psychological integration of the subject's own privilege into their interactions with the broader world (Bennett, 2004; Helms, 2014; Ponterotto, 1988). Early stages are characterized by passivity as individuals are unaware of their own interactions with racial privilege. After an experience or series of experiences awaken the person to their own role in privilege dynamics, they respond defensively either by minimizing or suppressing the issue or by leaning into negative stereotypes and beliefs (Bennett, 2004; Helms, 2014). At this point Helms (2014) puts forward a sequential movement through idealization of marginalized groups and denigration of whiteness towards critical consciousness and integration. Ponterotto (1988) on the other hand, suggests that idealization of marginalized groups and zealous, but uncritical activism may occur in place of defensiveness, and that either defensiveness or zealotry can resolve into integration. In all cases, a White person passes through a highly emotional response to racial privilege before reaching a calmer and more intellectual state of integration, which is achieved through intentional education on racial dynamics and self-reflection (Helms, 2014; Ponterotto, 1988).

Whiteness in Relation to the Other

As the existence of racial identity development models suggests, not all White people are or wish to remain unaware of the impact internalized whiteness has on POC and therefore work to develop an explicit understanding of their White identity (Helms, 2014). This process leads towards allyship with POC against racist systems. The path towards allyship also begins with sensitizing experiences, which bring a White person's attention to issues of racial

injustice (Helms, 2014; Krejci, 2007). The White person then typically engage in activities designed to increase their awareness of racist systems and promote self-reflection (Brown, 2019; Helms 2014). They then engage in a variety of actions that they perceive to be supportive of POC. These often include advocating for POC needs, seeking to bond with POC, and calling out other White people when they perceive that the other person has acted prejudicially (Badenhorst, 2021; Bergkamp et al., 2022; Bosco, 2019). White allies view themselves as informed, empathetic, and active in their pursuit of racial equity, although their actual actions may reflect varying levels of self-awareness (Badenhorst, 2021; Brown, 2019).

Overview

Research into the nature of whiteness and White identity is expansive and reveals consistent definitions of the values and beliefs that codify White culture. It also identifies consistent behaviors associated with coming to terms with White privilege and the effects of awareness on activist efforts. Oftentimes, earlier, less-critically conscious stages of identity development reflect White values of racial hierarchy, meritocracy, and paternalism more heavily than later stages. Although psychological research into whiteness is dense, it often avoids an intersectional lens and provides little insight into how gender, or alignment with any other target identity, might influence the identity development process or embodiment of White culture.

Womanhood and Identity

It is important to note that research into experiences of womanhood have historically focused on the experiences of upper and middle-class White women and has presented those findings as generalizable across different races and classes. This universalizing approach erases the experiences of women of Color and lower-class women, who held different roles in their communities and who have labored outside the home for much longer and with different

purpose than their more privileged counterparts. Thus, the literature discussed in this section, although heavily influenced by the perspectives of White women, is framed by the authors as describing the experiences of womanhood more broadly and does not reflect the intersectional approach taken in the following section focusing on White womanhood.

Gender Roles over Time

Throughout western history womanhood has been defined in opposition to manhood and femininity in opposition to masculinity (Miller, 1991). Thus, qualities and domains of womanhood have been considered incompatible with male interests and pursuits. This distinction has created clear expectations of expertise for women in several specific domains which include sexual skill, emotional competence, child and elder care, and household management (Meeussen & Koudenburg, 2022; Miller, 1991). Furthermore, women are expected to maintain an effortless, morally virtuous, and uncomplaining image as they attend to these areas (Miller, 1991; Schuller, 2021). Women are often framed as moral pillars within a community, responsible for both embodying the values of the community themselves and engendering them in others (Penna, 2018). However, women's labor in these realms, while expected is also discounted or even invisible due to sexism and misogyny and a primary goal of early feminists was to bring recognition and appreciation to "women's work" (Johnson, 2017).

While the traditional gender roles and expectations above still exist, they have become complicated by women's increased independence and integration into formal workplaces (Hoffman, 2006). As women have taken on more roles in historically masculine spaces, they have not been relieved of the expectations of womanhood described above. Instead, they must maintain competence in those areas while also performing traditionally masculine skills at a

high level in the workplace (Cossens & Jackson, 2020; Meeussen & Koudenburg, 2022). The compounding demands placed on women result in persistent feelings of insufficiency, frustration, and stress, which may be directed internally towards themselves or externally towards individual or institutions they believe contribute to their oppression (Cossens & Jackson, 2020; Hoffman, 2006; Miller, 1991).

Women in the Workplace

Women's entry into the workplace has aligned closely with the cultural expectations of womanhood, with career opportunities first becoming available in the areas of childhood education and nursing (Bauer, 2021; Miller, 1991). A disproportionate concentration of women in fields associated with caregiving persists even in the current employment landscape (Meeussen & Koudenburg, 2022). Y. Lee (2014) suggests that this phenomenon is due to discriminatory hiring practices that funnel women towards caregiving roles and societal influences that discourage women from seeking less feminine, often higher paying roles. Sacrificing personal comfort and time to support their workplace are common experiences for women, and many feel unsupported by their employers (Bandali, 2020). Bandali (2020) argues that the prevalence of self-sacrificing expectations for women in caretaking careers is associated with societal expectations that women will sacrifice in order to care for others in non-professional settings.

Women are also subject to post-feminist, neoliberal expectations of working womanhood, which include beliefs that women can and should excel in every domain of their lives through constant effort and dedication (Cossens & Jackson, 2020). This rhetoric was popularized by Facebook executive, Sheryl Sandberg, in her popular book urging women to "lean in" by embodying greater confidence and competence in the workplace in order to both

climb the career ladder and be fully engaged as a caregiver for their family (Kim et al., 2018).
The "lean in" approach to success in both work and life is held up as a goal that is difficult,
but attainable through personal growth in a wide array of popular media (Orgad, 2017). The
message that women receive is that through individual optimization of their skills, time
management, and character they can break the "glass ceiling" without sacrificing their
femininity and family life (Kim et al., 2018; Orgad, 2017). Unfortunately, this approach often
leads to exhaustion, shame, and greater pressure on women to take responsibility for
dismantling patriarchal and misogynistic work environments (Cossens & Jackson, 2020; Kim
et al., 2018, Schuller, 2021).

Overview

Women have historically been positioned as the moral, emotional center of the
community and their efforts have been focused on the family unit and household management.
While there is certainly value in these endeavors, due to patriarch and misogyny, women's
labor, which often consists largely of caregiving and supportive tasks, is devalued. In their
efforts to enter the traditionally masculine workplaces, women have found themselves
directed towards caregiving fields like education and nursing and have met with significant
societal resistance when they attempt to reach positions of power and influence. Many women
have responded to this sexism by attempting to excel in all areas of their professional and
personal lives simultaneously. As a result, many women report experiencing feelings of
personal insufficiency and frustration as they attempt to navigate sexism in the workplace
while also maintain a high standard of caregiving at home. Again, it must be noted most of the
literature discussed above makes universalizing assumptions that center White, middle-class
women's experiences without acknowledging that race and class have historically had a

significant impact on the nature of women's social position and relationship to labor. Since this dissertation focuses on the experiences of White women, this class of research on universal women's experiences is still relevant but must be analyzed with its universalizing tendencies in mind.

White Womanhood

White Women and Racial Discourse

When an intersectional perspective takes both race and gender into consideration, White womanhood becomes more complex than either whiteness or womanhood alone. White women have filled and upheld a problematic position between White men and POC since the early days of the American women's suffrage movement (Harris, 2020; Schuller, 2021). Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, both central figures in the women's suffrage movement and White women, initially aligned their movement with the Black suffrage movement shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War. However, they later changed their rhetoric to position White women as superior to Black men on the basis of race and openly pursued the support of White supremacist groups to bolster their cause (Harris, 2020; Schuller, 2021). This legacy still colors feminist movements today, and White women frequently compare their struggle to that of Black men while withholding or withdrawing support from intersectional feminist efforts (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Miller, 1991; Schuller, 2021).

Through this process, White women also became symbolic of White supremacist values and played an active role in framing POC generally, and Black men in particular, as sub-human and threatening (Harris, 2020; Schuller, 2021). White women were positioned as fragile and in need of protection in order to justify punitive and violent suppression of POC and have since internalized this message (Frankenberg, 1988; Miller & Lensmire, 2020).

While some White women intentionally weaponize this dynamic due to their own racial prejudice, others unconsciously maintain the narrative to gain social or political influence (Miller & Lensmire, 2020). However, although public recognition of this dynamic has grown in recent years, many White women are unaware of their troubling connections to racial discourse (Bosco, 2019).

White Women in Relation to the Other

As the previous sections suggest, not all White efforts towards allyship and anti-racism truly serve the needs of POC (Badenhorst, 2021; Helms, 2014). Instead, they work to relieve guilt and shame associated with White privilege while upholding racist systems (Badenhorst, 2021). This is particularly evident in spaces where White women engage with racial issues (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Nuru & Arendt, 2019). When women's issues and racial issues intersect, White women consistently focus on the women's issues they feel are relevant to them at the expense and exclusion of POC women (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Schuller, 2021). White women also highlight their oppressed rank as women in a defensive maneuver when confronted with critiques of their behavior as a White person (Nuru & Arendt, 2019; Schuller, 2021). This shifting of focus between their privileged racial status and oppressed gender status and its effects on POC have been well documented, however, there is little research regarding White women's perceptions of this dynamic (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Nuru & Arendt, 2019, Schuller, 2021).

Overview

Intersectional research on the experiences and identities of White women is a relatively new, but enthusiastic area of scholarly exploration. It has largely focused on developing a historical perspective of White women's role in maintaining racial hierarchies. Within the field

of psychology, most research on White women has been related to their interactions with POC through activism. This area almost exclusively focuses on the perspectives of POC activist on their White counterparts' contributions, both positive and negative, and rarely addresses how White women themselves conceptualize their positionality.

Nonprofit Organizations

Power in Contemporary NPOs

NPOs are organizations that operate similarly to for-profit businesses, but which are motivated by a goal other than the pursuit of financial profit (Y. Lee, 2014). Although this allows NPOs to focus on providing necessary, but unprofitable services, the underlying financial and leadership structures in most NPOs mirror colonial power structures that maintain high SES, White men as the ones who hold power over others (Heckler, 2019). This can be seen in the philanthropic models that many NPOs use to cover their business expenses, wherein wealth donors exercise power by providing or withholding necessary funds at their own discretion (Ojeda & Wall, 2023; Penna, 2018). Oftentimes, NPO board and leadership positions are held by wealthy, White individuals who are not part of the communities that their organizations serve.

According to Iyer and Achia (2021), this dynamic suppresses marginalized communities' abilities to organize and advocate effectively for themselves, thereby upholding the colonial status quo. Finally, White NPO workers at every level internalize colonial racial and gendered hierarchies and unconsciously uphold them within their own organizational structures and when interacting with marginalized communities, thereby directly supporting the ideologies of colonialism (Bauer, 2021; Heckler, 2019).

Origins of NPOs in America

The current power dynamics of NPOs can be better understood in the context of their historical origins. Penna (2018) traces the development of NPOs back to the establishment of charity houses and churches in the 1780s. Both forms of community support were rooted in Protestant Christian values of giving and labor, which imbued a strong sense of religious morality in charitable giving of either money or labor (Pascoe, 1990; Penna, 2018). Over the course of the 1800s as more people relocated from small communities to urban centers, charitable organizations began to become more structured and less tightly linked with local religious institutions. These new "benevolent organizations" while providing necessary social supports were also strong mechanisms for impressing White upper-class values and expectations on the populations they served (Bauer, 2021; Penna, 2018). This can be seen in the establishment of freedmen's schools during the Reconstruction era and boarding schools for Indigenous children throughout the late 1800s, which were intended to teach Black and Indigenous children to be successful through assimilation into White American culture and promoted settler colonialism (Pascoe, 1990, Schuller, 2021). As benevolent organizations continued to expand and fill social gaps not met by the government, the nonprofit sector began to emerge (Penna, 2018). By the 1950s NPOs abounded, meeting a wide variety of social needs and serving a wide array of populations. Although many NPOs are now secular, the vestiges of social control and moral correctness that characterized benevolent organizations often persist (Bauer, 2021; Penna, 2018).

White Women and NPOs

It is impossible to discuss the rise of NPOs in America without mentioning the significant role White upper and middle-class women played throughout history and their

ongoing involvement today. Although these women's activities were confined to the realms of family and the home for much of America's history, they found an outlet in benevolent work, which centered traditionally feminine skills like caregiving and early childhood education (Penna, 2018). Although women did not own these organizations, they were responsible for the majority of the daily operations and direct care which allowed them a greater level of influence and freedom than they could otherwise expect (Bauer, 2021; Penna, 2018). Upper class women were able to wield even more power by using the feminine concept of charitable giving to enter the realm of organized fundraising for their chosen causes (Johnson, 2017). This gave them substantial influence by allowing them to direct funds towards social activism and benevolent organizations that aligned with their personal worldviews (Johnson, 2017; Schuller, 2021).

The emphasis on promoting a specific worldview did not stop at the funding level. Pascoe (1990) describes the concept of the "charitable visitor", which defined the self-selected role of White women throughout the 1800s. Jane Addams (1899), an early figure in the development of social work, described the charity visitor as "a young college woman, well-bred and open-minded" who feels "obliged to . . . treat the members of the family [that she is visiting] almost exclusively as factors in the industrial system." White women saw themselves as benefactors who would visit communities they considered less fortunate in order to "help" them move towards the White woman's ideal (Pascoe, 1990; Schuller, 2021). An ideal that reified the racial hierarchies and status quos that maintained the privileged position of wealth White men and, just below them, White women at the top of the social ladder (Bauer, 2021; Schuller, 2021). In the more than 100 years since Jane Addams described the archetypal charity visitor, the demographics of workers in NPOs, particularly those focused on caregiving or social support, have changed little. Y. Lee (2014) finds that, in fact, the

overrepresentation of women in NPOs overall is directly related to the concentration of caregiving disciplines within the nonprofit sector. Furthermore, the women who typically work in caregiving NPOs are usually more educated and have higher socioeconomic status (SES) than their counterparts in similar for-profit organizations, closely mirroring Addams' (1899) description of a "college educated" and "wellbred" woman.

Overview

Recent research has begun to examine the systemic power dynamics that exist within the nonprofit sector, with a particular focus on the ways in which NPOs in the US reinforce social hierarchies and colonial power structures that uphold the privileged positions of wealthy White men. At times this dynamic even inhibits the exact kind of sustainable community building and development that the NPO intends to promote. An examination of the historical context of NPOs in the US and White women's role in their development highlights the involvement of both in promoting adherence to the status quo in the name of benevolence. However, it also important to note that the majority of people engaged in the nonprofit sector today are unaware of this historical context or the ways it likely influences their work or philanthropy.

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Summary

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A survey of the extant literature describes White identity and its development, women's management of their gendered oppression, and White women's complicated position adjacent to White manhood. Much of this research focuses on the individualized experiences of the participants within either the domain of gender or the domain of race. There is a gap in the literature regarding ways in which White women navigate their intersectional positionality as both White people and women. Furthermore, although both racial and gender oppression

are recognized as systemic throughout the literature, there appears to be two major categories of research that directly address oppressive systems. The first describes the oppressive nature of specific systems and their effects on an oppressed group, and the second examines ways that privileged individuals attempt to reorient themselves in opposition to oppressive social systems. There is little research that describe the ways in which close contact with a specific system of oppression impacts a privileged persons' relationship to their own privilege. This study provides new scholarly insight into intersectional identity development in White women within a context that highlights both the systemic privilege and oppression that they experience.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Frameworks

Social Constructivism and Transformative Frameworks

Social constructivists view knowledge as the product of interactions between people and their environment and believe that the processes of interpersonal interaction and context create subjective experiences of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Elements of history, culture, and personal experience impact both the researcher and participants in ways that fundamentally define what is known and true. This perspective is particularly relevant to questions regarding identity and social location because those categories are socially constructed by definition and therefore a social constructivist framework is well positioned to explore and describe the nuanced and flexible perspectives associated with identity. However, social constructivism alone does not adequately address the effects of power, privilege, and oppression on the research process.

Transformative frameworks expand on social constructivism to include assumptions of power within society generally and the researcher/participant dynamic in particular (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They aim to address the concerns and experiences of marginalized groups and, through their work, transform society in ways that promote equity and improve society. This researcher uses a combination of two transformative frameworks, critical whiteness studies and intersectionality to explore the complex interactions between White women's gender and race.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical race theory (CRT) examines the structural and systemic mechanisms that perpetuate racism and uses that perspective to analyze phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). CRT was originally developed in the United States as a method to better describe the complex

interactions of power and race within the American legal system, which frequently result in the covert oppression of POC on the basis of race. Since its initial development, CRT had been adopted and expanded to provide a framework for conceptualizing research in numerous disciplines including history, education, sociology, and psychology (Salter & Adams, 2013). Within psychology, CRT has three core tenants: a focus on the interaction between race and power, an emphasis on the impact of systems on individuals, and an interest in promoting transformative social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Salter & Adams, 2013).

CRT makes some key assumptions about the nature of race and power within American society. First, interactions between race and power are hierarchical with whiteness positioned as to dominant racial category and dependent on the subjugation of other racial groups in order to maintain its own superiority (DiAngelo, 2016). The processes of racial subjugation and oppression are often obscured by language that denies a racial basis of oppression which preserves the psychological comfort of White people by allowing them to deny racist intent.

Furthermore, racism is upheld by systems rather than individuals. It is important to note that "systems" is an intentionally broad term and includes political, legal, economic, and social systems (Salter & Adams, 2013). As a result, individuals can engage in the perpetuation of racist systems without intending to perpetuate racism or personally holding racially prejudicial beliefs (DiAngelo, 2016). Finally, CRT seeks to promote social change by uncovering the processes and systems that result in racial oppression by describing the challenges faced POC (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Whereas CRT focuses on the perspectives and experiences of POC, Critical whiteness studies (CWS) applies the same race conscious framework to White people and the systems

that uphold whiteness as a source of power (Salter & Adams, 2013). CWS is concerned with White perspectives on, methods for maintaining, and benefits from White supremacy (Chen, 2017; Matias, 2016). It assumes that whiteness and its associated privileges and practices are perceived as the cultural baseline against which other cultures are compared (Heckler, 2019; Salter & Adams, 2013). This perceived neutrality results in the invisibility of White culture, particularly amongst White individuals who often already fit the mold of whiteness by virtue of their race and socialization (Heckler, 2019). This allows White people to avoid critically assessing their own position within society and is further supported by a pervasive investment in avoiding emotional distress associated with confronting the effects of White privilege (Bergkamp et al., 2022; Matias, 2016). As a methodology CWS examines the often unspoken cultural, social, and political practices of whiteness in an effort to promote awareness and transformation in oppressive systems (Chen, 2017).

In this study, White women are impacted by the broader social systems of American culture and White culture as well as the more specific economic and organizational structures within the NPOs they work for, all of which uphold systems of racial and gender hierarchy. CRT and CWS are well suited to examining the systemic influences on White Women and their personal responses to those systems within a racially sensitive framework. The inclusion of CWS is particularly useful in identifying the subtle ways in which race is perceived and discussed by White people. However, race is not the only aspect of social location at play in my research questions. Gender, and more specifically the interaction between gender and race, is also relevant and requires the inclusion of aspects that cannot be addressed using CRT alone.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a methodology is rooted in feminist theory and seeks to analyze the impact of overlapping systems of power and oppression as they relate to one's social location (Cho et al., 2013). Similar to CRT, intersectionality originated in the realm of legal studies as a way to describe the impact of having multiple oppressed identities on individuals (Cho et al., 2013). Early intersectional analyses lead by Kimberlé Crenshaw and bell hooks focused on Black women in America, whose experiences did not align with those of Black men or White women due to their multiply oppressed position as both Black people and women in a racist and patriarchal society (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Throughout the 1990s and into the present scholars in a wide variety of fields adapted and expanded intersectionality to address more intersections of oppression in new contexts (Collins, 2019). Although this rapid adoption of intersectionality has allowed the concept to become a well-respected and recognized means for considering overlapping identities, it has also led to significant debate over the definition and appropriate usage of intersectionality as a methodology (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019).

Relevant to this study are questions regarding intersectionality's application to privileged identities and its relationship to CWS. Early intersectional work focused narrowly on the interactions between race, gender, and class although it has since expanded to include other aspects of identity such as disability status and sexual and gender orientation and when attention remains on the interaction between two or more oppressed identities scholars generally agree that intersectionality is an appropriate approach (Carastathis, 2016; Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019). However, opinions differ when considering only a single oppressed identity (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Some scholars argue that intersectionality was originally intended to and should remain focused on uncovering the overlooked challenges

presented by having multiply oppressed identities (Cho et al., 2013, 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Warner, 2008).

Others recenter intersectionality as a means to dissect social power dynamics rather than a way to understand complexities of oppression alone (Carastathis, 2016; Chen, 2017; Cho et al., 2013). This perspective sees aspects of identity as markers that afford degrees of power within socially constructed dynamics that can change as society does and examines their relevance within that context (Carastathis, 2016; Cho et al., 2013; Warner, 2008). In doing so scholars can apply the complex power analysis, which intersectionality is known for, to broader constellations of identity that include both privileged and oppressed aspects (Carastathis, 2016; Cho et al., 2013).

Due to intersectionality's origins in describing the Black experience, some scholars believe that it exists in opposition to CWS (Chen, 2017; Cho et al., 2013; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). From the identity-oriented school of intersectionality CWS's focus on the privileged experience of whiteness would not contribute to the revealing of nuanced forms of oppression resulting from multiple oppressed identities, thereby rendering it fundamentally at odds with intersectionality (Chen, 2017; Prudie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). However, from a power-analysis perspective, White privilege has a substantial impact on the way a person exists in the world and therefore should not be overlooked as a relevant aspect of identity within an intersectional analysis (Carastathis, 2016; Cho et al., 2013). Furthermore, failing to consider whiteness when addressing a different, oppressed aspect of someone's identity contributes to the normalization of whiteness as a cultural neutral, which undercuts intersectionality's goal to unmask nuances in social power structures (Carastathis, 2016; Chen, 2017; Warner, 2008).

In this study, I aim to examine the ways in which race and gender interact to affect White women's perceptions of their own power and agency. The methodology of intersectionality provides the conceptual tools to examine these topics with sensitivity and nuance. Furthermore, precedent, though limited, exists for applying an intersectional framework to a combination of privileged and oppressed identities within the context of social power. However, I believe it is important to recognize the work of predominately Black female scholars in the creation and development of intersectionality and their original intention to not only describe oppressive power structures but transform them. In applying their work to the experiences of White women I seek to honor their efforts towards greater equity by critically examining White women's relationships with power in terms of gender and race in the hopes of promoting reflection and social change.

Research Approach: Grounded Theory

This study aims to examine the complex processes that White women use to conceptualize and respond to internal tension between racial privilege and gender oppression within the specific context of nonprofit work. As such, a qualitative approach is necessary to fully capture the details, nuances, and context of participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the social constructivist and transformative frameworks that I am applying to this study encapsulate ontological and epistemological beliefs that center co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants. The close personal interaction that characterizes many forms of qualitative research is necessary to facilitate the level of interpersonal connection required for co-construction to occur.

Grounded theory is one such approach, initially created by Glaser and Strauss which aims to develop a mid-range explanatory theory based in close analysis of field data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory uses inductive or "bottom up" logic to identify and connect themes based on patterns that emerge in data rather than deductive logic, which tests a conceptual theory against data (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). The use of inductive logic is a key component in ensuring that the voices of participants, rather than the researcher, are centered within the study's findings (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 2006). However, grounded theory also recognizes that researchers naturally bring their own perspectives and biases to the data analysis process and seeks to mitigate this through a process of self-reflection and disclosure on the part of the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). This technique honors the limits of generalizability for any subsequent theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). Thus, grounded theory is well suited to defining the complex processes associated with White women's internal struggle between their privileged and oppressed identities.

Finally, grounded theory is particularly interested in the ways that participants seek to reconcile their struggles, thereby creating a theory rather than simply a description of participants' experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). My study seeks to examine not only the nature of White women's relationship with race and gender, but also the mechanisms they use to navigate that relationship. In other words, how do White women reconcile the struggle associated with experiencing both racial privilege and gender-based oppression? Grounded theory's emphasis on identifying mechanisms of reconciliation is particularly well suited to addressing this question.

Research Strategy: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Although Glaser and Strauss (2006) clearly codified the general structure of grounded theory, the school has developed several off-shoots in the intervening years. Classical grounded theory has positivistic roots that sought to develop a strict method of application and held subtle assumptions of the universality of human nature even as it carefully limited the scope of its theories (Charmaz, 2014). Over the course of the 1990s, Charmaz and other social constructivists rejected these ontological and epistemological assumptions, while maintaining the methods of data collection, coding, and constant comparison that characterized grounded theory. They emphasized an open-ended approach and iterative logic to data collection and analysis in order to center the act of co-construction occurring between the participants and researcher.

Constructivist grounded theory clearly identifies the frame within which a theory is conceived by identifying the position of the researcher, the participants, the interplay between the two, and the context of the interviews and data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This approach aligns with my social constructivist and transformative frameworks and is equipped to capture the interplay between myself as a White woman and participants as we discuss our shared identity.

Hermeneutics

Constructivist grounded theory provides clear steps for conducting research in a consistent yet flexible manner, however having such a clearly defined process can lead to rote utilization of analytic tools without attending to the complex interactions between researcher and data (Charmaz, 2014). Hermeneutics provides the philosophical underpinnings necessary critically assess and interpretive process taking place within grounded theory. Although

hermeneutics is already implicit within grounded theory, an explicit discussion of its key principles allow me to integrate them more effectively into my data analysis methods.

Hermeneutics was originally developed by biblical scholars as a method for interpreting texts and centers the interaction between parts of text, the whole work, and the scholar in producing meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Schleiermacher, an early hermeneutic scholar, identified the importance of seeking to understand the perspective and context of the author in addition to seeking to understand the text alone (Smith et al., 2009). Although this approach is debated in literary circles, within psychological research, where data is analyzed shortly after its collection, it is relatively easy to identify contextual elements that inform our understanding of the participant themselves and thereby provides depth to our interpretation of their data.

Heidegger takes Schleiermacher's work a step further by asserting that the context of the interpreter or researcher also affects interpretation of a work or data (Smith et al., 2009). He uses the term, fore-structure, to describe the preconceptions, experiences, and biases that a researcher brings into the interpretive process and notes that the fore-structure influences what meaning a researcher creates during analysis. However, he also notes that interaction with a text can bring previously unexamined or unidentified elements of the fore-structure into relevance thus creating a dynamic interaction between the fore-structure and the data.

Gadamer expands this idea somewhat by encouraging openness and sensitivity during the interpretive process to the ongoing, potentially unpredictable influences of the fore-structure and text on one another (Smith et al., 2009). In order to achieve this sensitivity, scholars use the hermeneutic circle, which is a conceptual tool that illustrates interactions between the part and the whole and the data and the researcher as a circular logical process

rather than a linear one. The circle emphasizes the back-and-forth movement between these elements as central to interpretation and allows researchers to make informed intuitive connections as their analysis progresses.

Method

Foregrounding

Grounded theory recognizes and clearly identifies the researcher as an instrument within the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). As such, the researcher's identity, worldview, and biases naturally impact the data collection, analysis, and resulting theories (Charmaz, 2014).

Furthermore, hermeneutics also asks the researcher to identify their own fore-structure as much as possible before beginning the interpretive process (Smith et al., 2009). To help identify these factors and clarify the researcher's role in co-construction of meaning, grounded theorists use a process called foregrounding to call attention to their relationship and possible influences on the research they perform (Charmaz, 2014).

This researcher is a White, able-bodied, cis-gendered woman with a middle-class background. As a White woman myself, I have a close connection to both the topics being researched and the participants I expect to interview. While this could be beneficial in allowing participants to feel comfortable speaking about sensitive topics like race and gender with me, it may also make it difficult for me to identify patterns and beliefs that are normalized for White women since my own perspective is embedded within that cultural context. I am also passionate about social justice issues and highly aware of my own privileged position in many identity domains including race. I am still developing my critical consciousness in this respect and am not immune to feelings of guilt and shame when

thinking about the role White women have and still do play in maintaining White supremacist racial hierarchies. Although I seek to critically examine White women's experiences, my own desire to right historical wrongs could lead me to become defensive or to distance myself from the concept of White womanhood throughout the research process.

Furthermore, although I have never been employed by an NPO, I have volunteered for a variety of NPOs with missions related to various aspects of education and community care. These experiences color my assumptions about the nature of nonprofit work and the general ethos of the nonprofit sector. For one, I sometimes conflate nonprofit work with providing social services, which does not capture the breadth of the nonprofit sector nor does it recognize that nonprofit workers do not always work in capacities that have direct interaction with the populations their organizations serve. I also believe that nonprofits in the United States are both problematic in that they often uphold damaging status quos and yet are also necessary because the meet societal needs that are otherwise unaddressed. Although I strive to maintain a middle ground conceptualization of NPOs, I sometimes vacillate between seeing them as largely good or predominately damaging. This fluctuation could come through in my analysis as well.

Theoretical Sampling and Population

Grounded theory is well served by the use of a theoretical sampling technique to select participants because it allows the researcher to adjust their participant pool to better explore emerging theoretical categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Theoretical sampling enables the researcher to alter their inclusion criteria in line with the iterative process of data collection and analysis that characterizes grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). My inclusion criteria required participants to be over the age of 18 and self-identify as both White and as women.

They must also have been an employee of a nonprofit organization for at least 12 months in the past five years. This criterion was designed to ensure that participants had sufficient experience as employees in nonprofit settings and that their experience was recent.

Recruitment and Consent

Due to the iterative nature of theoretical sampling and grounded theory, this study required multiple rounds of data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the initial round of data collection, participants were solicited via the use of flyers and advertisements on social media networks focused on NPO workers. Flyers and advertisements indicated that the study was soliciting interviews from White women who currently or recently worked for a nonprofit organization regarding their experiences. Subsequent rounds of data collection used a snowball method to identify new participants based on the recommendations of existing participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants were compensated with a $10 gift card to a major coffee chain after completing the interview. Participants were informed that interviews would last approximately one hour and would take place remotely via a secure video platform. They also consented to video and audio recording of interviews. Recordings were destroyed immediately after audio was transcribed, deidentified, and stored in a secure database. All participants reviewed and signed informed consent prior to scheduling an interview.

Participants

There were a total of five participants involved in this study. All five self-identified as White women. Participant ages were captured in 10-year bands. One participant identified as 25–34 years old, one as 35–44, one at 45–54, and two as 55–64. All participants had experience in multiple fields withing the nonprofit sector including education, arts, advocacy,

and health. All participants had experience in social and human services. Although participants were not queried or selected based on their geographic location, all participants volunteered their geographic location. Three had lived and worked primarily in the Midwest, one in the Northwest, and one reported living and working in both the Southwest and Northwest.

Sample Size and Theoretical Saturation

Determining when to stop collecting data can be a challenge in qualitative studies due to the small sample sizes that characterize qualitative research. Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies cannot rely on statistical analysis to determine when results are likely to be significant or representative (Sim et al., 2018). This has to led debate regarding the appropriate sample size for a grounded theory study, with recommendations ranging anywhere from five to 35 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sim et al., 2018). However, Ebbinghaus (2005) argues that such recommendations fail to consider the purpose of qualitative research, which is not to put forward highly generalizable results based on random sampling and focused on a few highly specific variables, but to engage is deep comparative analysis when discrete variables cannot be effectively isolated. He further states that in many cases a carefully selected small sample is more likely to produce intelligible, relevant findings than a larger sample. He notes that this is particularly important when using inductive analysis, such as in the case of grounded theory, because each subsequent participant interviewed after reaching theoretical saturation has the potential to introduce new variables that serve only to muddy the analysis. Although this argument may sound like cherry picking in the context of quantitative research, the purpose of qualitative research and therefore its relationship to data collection is fundamentally different.

Ebbinghaus (2005) describes this difference stating, "qualitative comparison may serve a different function, namely to test a proposition with a few given variables and this makes the 'too many variables' problem less pertinent" (p. 142).

Furthermore, increasing the size of the participant pool beyond theoretical saturation has the potential to not only make analysis more difficult, but to damage the validity of the data as well. The nature of inductive analysis makes it possible for researchers with large, deep data sets to "fish" for themes or connections that may not be truly well-represented in the population being studied (Ebbinghaus, 2005; Trotter, 2012). Thus, it is important to carefully assess and reassess for theoretical saturation throughout data collection and avoid continuing to collect data beyond that point in order to ensure validity (Ebbinghaus, 2005; Sim et al., 2018). Weller et al. (2018) also supports the utility of small sample sizes in qualitative research, reporting that collection of salient data increases with the amount of information provide by each participant much more quickly than it did when more participants provide less information per participant. This suggests that data collection methods that collect a large amount of information per participant through open-ended interviews will reach theoretical saturation with fewer participants than methods that limit the information provided by each participant (Weller et al., 2018).

However, theoretical saturation is not only influenced by the number of participants and the method of data collection. It is also tied to the target population and sampling methods used to identify participants (Ebbinghaus, 2005; Trotter, 2012). As previously discussed, this study used snowball sampling to identify participants. Trotter (2012) recommends this approach as a means of collecting participants with "expert" perspectives who also fit "key characteristics required by the research design," in this case White women working in NPOs

(p. 400). Using this sampling approach allowed me to quickly identify a very tightly targeted set of participants who were more likely to reach consensus on relevant themes with a fewer number of participants than a less targeted sampling approach would have produced (Curtis et al., 2000; Trotter, 2012). I then carefully examined each new set of data for new themes or variable related to my emerging theory and ceased data collection when no new themes emerged (Curtis et al., 2000; Ebbinghaus, 2005; Sim et al., 2018). This approach resulted in a relatively small sample size of five participants, however, the careful selection of participants who were highly representative of my target population as well as the use of an intensive, open-ended data collection style allowed me to reach theoretical saturation quickly. The variety in participant ages, work experiences, and geographic regions also provide sufficient variation for effective comparative analysis despite the small sample size.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected using the intensive interview technique described by Charmaz (2014), which seeks to be "open-ended yet directed" to allow the participants to provide a detailed account of experiences related to the research question (Charmaz, 2014, p. 187). This approach balances the need to illicit responses that are at least somewhat related to the researcher's areas of interest and theoretical sensitivity while still providing enough space for participants to put forward the novel perspective and rich data that is necessary to use inductive reasoning. The interviews were shaped to illicit responses related to participants awareness and experience of their gender and race within the context of their work at NPOs. Interviews sought information on participants perspectives on their whiteness and womanhood individually and their intersecting identities as White women. This was intended to create contrast and identify differences in how participants discuss their individual identities versus

their intersection (Warner, 2008). Sample questions are outlined in the interview guide in

Appendix A and the rationale for the structure and phrasing of the interview guide is

addressed in the next section. However, the iterative nature of grounded theory and the

theoretical sampling model allowed modification to interview questions in order to better

target emerging theoretical categories and so small adjustments to the interview guide were

made throughout the data collection process to better develop emerging categories (Charmaz,

2014). Participants also completed a brief survey, found in Appendix B, when applying to

participate in the research project which collected demographic data. This data was used to

ensure participants meet inclusion criteria and to contextualize the participants based on their

work experience and age.

The Interview and the Problem of Dysconsciousness

Discussion of racial inequity in interviews is likely to trigger dysconscious moves in

White participants due to their agent rank in the domain of race. Dysconscious moves are

designed to shift focus away from and allay the discomfort associated with recognition of an

agent's privilege in juxtaposition to target's experiences of oppression (King, 1991). This can

cause difficulties when attempting to interview agents with regard to their own privilege and

power because they may redirect conversation away from the topics the researcher seeks to

explore (Demirci, 2024; King, 1991). However, directly challenging an agent engaging in

dysconscious moves can further trigger a strong defensiveness that derails the interview.

Although my own visible identity as a White woman, and therefore a group "insider," likely

helped participants feel more comfortable sharing perspectives that they may not share with

an "outsider" who they might perceive as more critical or threatening, shared social location

alone is not sufficient to overcome hesitancy when discussing sensitive topics (Demirci, 2024).

Therefore, it is important to develop a thorough and strategic interview guide that anticipates dysconsciousness and attempts to preempt common maneuvers. However, a grounded theorist must also be sensitive to developing questions that unintentionally lead participants towards the researcher's own presuppositions or biases. Thus, the interview guide for a grounded theory study examining privilege dynamics must walk a fine line between seeking descriptions of dynamics that participants actively avoid considering while also allowing sufficient space for true inductive analysis to take place (Charmaz, 2014). Toward this end, I strove to organize and phrase my questions in ways that were less likely to trigger defensiveness and redirection away from issues of power and privilege.

The interview guide progressed from questions less likely to trigger a strong emotional response to those more likely to do so. For instance, questions regarding gender identity precede questions that involve race because it is often more comfortable for people to discuss their own target domains than their agent domains (DiAngelo, 2016). The interview also begins with broad contextualizing questions about the participants' work history, which allowed me to build rapport before addressing more personal topics (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023). To avoid redirection, I also phrase follow up questions in ways that imply that factors such as race or gender have impacted the participants' experiences without suggesting specific ways that those factors may have been relevant. This allowed me to continue seeking examples of ways participants interface with race and gender even if participants denied or had difficulty articulating those dynamics when queried in a more general way (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023).

Data Analysis Procedures

Iterative Process and Constant Comparison

Data was analyzed using a constant comparative method through which the researcher alternates between data analysis and collection in an iterative process (Charmaz, 2014). As the body of data grows, constant comparison allows the researcher to identify and explore emerging themes with a high degree of flexibility. It also encourages researchers to engage in a hermeneutical process of moving between interpreting individual pieces of data and the whole of the data in a circular fashion (Smith et al., 2009). One cycle of analysis consisted of conducting three interviews, coding transcripts of those interviews, and identifying emerging categories.

Two more cycles of analysis were completed in this manner with the following two interviews. During each cycle I moved back and forth between different transcripts in order to better identify themes (Charmaz, 2014). Before engaging in subsequent rounds of analysis small adjustments based in emerging evidence were made to the interview questions to seek more in-depth accounts and lived examples (Charmaz, 2014). For instance, early interviews uncovered that participants had difficulty comparing their own experiences with those of a male coworker of Color because many of them had not worked closely with men of Color. Therefore, in subsequent interviews this question was substituted with an existing follow-up question asking participants to compare their experiences with a female coworker of Color and then a White male coworker instead.

Subsequent cycles of analysis were not self-contained and incorporated both new and existing data in the analysis. I also continually compared codes and memos to one another in

order to uncover connections, divergencies, and contradictions that formed the basis for my theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Coding and Memoing

Charmaz (2014) uses initial and focused coding to distinguish types of labels used to identify categories of interest while analyzing data. Initial coding identifies interesting subjects, process details, actions, and setting that emerge in a transcript. The aim is a dense and extensive list of codes that describe multiple aspects the transcript in detail. During this process it is particularly important to consider the context of the participant and interview. This helps capture the nuanced and complex interactions that characterize intersectional research (Warner, 2008).

After this step, Charmaz (2014) moves on to focused coding, which examines the initial codes and creates labels that identify recurrent themes or ideas that appear there. Focused coding can then be sorted into categories or diagrammed to draw connections between ideas. Here it is useful to frequently refer to the hermeneutic circle by considering the context of focused codes, the initial codes they are derived from, and the original transcripts being analyzed (Smith et al., 2009). Doing so allows the researcher to draw informed inferences, which Charmaz (2014) refers to as abductive reasoning, while constructing their theory. Ultimately, a grounded theory is formed by connecting themes that are identified through coding in a cohesive document, but coding alone does not fully capture the analytic process.

Memoing is also an important tool in identifying emerging theories and is particularly valuable for capturing the analytic process itself (Charmaz, 2014). Memos are notes created throughout data analysis that describe a wide range of topics including the researcher's ongoing conceptualization process, responses to the content of transcripts, self-reflection,

contextual observations, and questions. Memos promote ongoing abstract analysis and keep

the researcher focused on the co-constructive aspect of theory development (Charmaz, 2014).

They are also a valuable opportunity to interact intentionally with the hermeneutic circle by

explicitly tracking interactions between the researcher and data. Finally, memos bolster the

eventual grounded theory by providing a clear accounting of the analytic process and

management of biases, which improves empirical rigor (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss,

2006)

Member Checking

Constructivist and transformative frameworks aim to highlight the role of participants

in the development of theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One way to center the perspectives of

participants is through member checking during the data analysis. Member checking can ask

participants to review the theories that researchers have constructed and provide feedback on

whether those theories accurately reflect their experiences, or it can ask participants to review

data collected for accuracy prior to analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although asking participants to review theories provides researchers with valuable insight into

the applicability of emerging theories, it can also raise challenges if the emerging theories,

while potentially valuable, trigger denial based in defensiveness during member checking

(Charmaz, 2014; Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023). Therefore, the second member checking

technique was utilized and participants who agreed to participate in member checking were

asked to review a transcript of the interview for accuracy. This approach sought to honor the

spirit of transformative frameworks by respecting participants' voices and insights, while also

balancing the sensitive nature of theory development when addressing topics of power and

privilege (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Demirci, 2024). Participants were asked if they would like

to participate in member-checking at the end of the interview. Three participants participated in member-checking and none identified any discrepancies or misrepresentations in the transcripts used for analysis.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Core Concepts

This analysis first presents the core concepts that emerged from the data to introduce the

building blocks that make up the grounded theory, which are elaborated on in the following

section. These concepts are themes that recurred frequently across participants, although the

precise expression of any given theme could vary between participants. Quotations from

participants presented in this section are deidentified to protect participants' privacy.

NPOs as Spaces for White Women

When describing the structure, benefits, and challenges of NPOs, participants often

reflected on the prevalence of White women in NPOs. They shared a belief NPOs often serve

as protective spaces for women that buffer them from sexism in the workplace. However,

participants also shared fears that NPOs are fragile due to their donation-driven revenue

sources and at risk of going out of business with little warning.

Protection from Sexism

NPOs, which were historically a haven for White women seeking professional work

outside the home, continue to represent a space where White women do not have to navigate the

patriarchy and misogyny of the broader world in order to build a career. All participants shared a

recognition that their involvement in NPOs buffered them from sexism with one participant

described this experience by saying,

> And the nonprofit world is heavy with women . . . and most of those fields have been
> really dominated by women. So I never really felt like there was lots of competition
> with men or that I was trying to break some glass ceiling or that I was being passed
> over for men because I was a woman. I've never felt that way.

Another participant described her decision to remain in the nonprofit sector due to her perception that career growth for women was more supported in NPOs than in the for-profit sector,

> I think for the most part nonprofit is friendly to women in leadership. I wouldn't say I naturally gravitated towards nonprofit so I could be a woman leader. I think I just found when I got into it that they were more comfortable, maybe that they supported and lifted up women leaders.

Comments like these demonstrate a strong, consistent conceptualization of NPOs as a space where women can thrive professionally and are insulated from overt sexism in ways that they believe are not available to women in the for-profit sector.

Fragile and Under Threat

However, White women also have a strong belief that NPOs are structurally fragile and at risk of succumbing to external pressures at any time. These pressures may be political as one participant noted stating that their organization, which provided reproductive healthcare for women, was "a particularly challenging place to work during the Trump administration," but, more often, the pressures are financial. If an NPO is not able to secure sufficient funding it can dramatically impact the services they provide and their ability to employ workers as another participant in a leadership position described,

> Thankfully, so far, we've been able to grow and sustain what we've grown. It certainly could impact their day-to-day if we didn't have enough funding. That might impact people's job or whether they can work full-time. It's certainly affected some of the services we can offer, and we've scaled back on what we can deliver because we don't have consistent funding to offer them. But mostly I think it impacts me and my stress level and kind of chewing my fingernails off worrying if we're going to be able to pay everyone.

Participants described believing that outside factors could have a substantial impact on funding and therefore the stability of an NPO. As a result, participants felt highly invested in efforts to

ensure the continued success of their NPOs and a need to constantly strive to maintain

organizational stability.

Mission, Culture, and Stability

Participants described two main methods for attempting to ensure the stability of their

NPOs. The first is to communicate the NPO's mission clearly and frequently to both potential

donors and the communities the NPO serves. By ensuring that as many community members

and potential donors as possible understand the value that the NPO adds by fulfilling its

mission, the participants believe they are increasing the likelihood that others will donate their

time or money to support the organization. Multiple participants emphasized the importance of

relationship building with community members at a variety of levels with one speaking from

the perspective of an executive saying,

> So I believe we're successful, probably anywhere nonprofit or for profit, in the
> relationships we build. So there wasn't probably a day that went by when I didn't
> engage in a relationship with a donor, or someone we don't know, or a potential
> corporate sponsor or a potential board member.

Another participant in a volunteer management position shared a very similar sentiment when

describing an important component of her professional identity saying,

> Relationships. Relationships with the people I work with, relationships with board
> members, relationships with volunteers. Relationship with community foundations, and
> the community at large. Really working on building relationships and knowing the
> people who can help grow your nonprofit.

The second strategy is to ensure that all members of the organization hold personal values that

clearly align with the perceived mission of the NPO. This can take the form of gatekeeping

participation in the organization as this participant described,

> I never wanted a volunteer to come to volunteer to just volunteer unless it was a match
> for them and for us. You're going to keep and retain someone here if they really
> understand what they're committed to, they really understand what it involves, and
> they would really like to. So that was part of those one-on-one conversations was
> making sure they really knew what they were signing up for.

It can also appear as testing existing members to ensure that they are able to perform investment in the mission adequately. One participant described seeing a co-worker struggle to sufficiently articulate his personal reasons for joining a specific NPO and the professional challenges he faced as a result saying,

> I definitely think he struggled a lot to claim his space in the reproductive rights movement because it is so female dominated. And I think that was a challenge for him to be like, "I do care about this issue, and this is why you should organize with me around this issue."

In all these situations, participants connected employee alignment with and clear communication of the organization's mission to stability and growth for the NPO. This is largely due to the important role communicating the mission plays in recruiting volunteers and funding sources external to the NPO. However, an employee's perceived dedication to the NPO's mission is also valued within the organization and can be seen as a factor in their ability to perform their job successfully.

Culture as Mission

It is important to note that participants did not draw a clear distinction between an NPO's mission and its organizational culture. In fact, culture often superseded mission when participants provided examples of embodying an organization's values. This can be seen in the previous example of the male co-worker supporting women's reproductive rights. It was not enough for him to value reproductive rights, he also had to justify his perceived mismatch as a man within a predominately female organization. Participants even identified their own close alignment with an organization's culture as a contributing factor in their own career success with one saying, "When I graduated I ended up working full time for . . . because it was aligned with my values and I ended up getting a lot of great experience." Another participant echoed the same sentiment saying,

> I loved that [role] because the mission was really important to me, but then I look back and I realize, oh, I've been very lucky to be in places with jobs that I really, really liked . . . and that definitely was the groove for me.

Participants link their personal success within an NPO with their ability to fit in with the culture of the NPO. However, they also conflate both the NPO's culture and its mission, thereby linking employees' ability to fit into the organizational culture with their ability to contribute to the overall stability of the NPO.

A SubCulture of White Womanhood

Of note, participants all described the majority of their NPO experience as taking place in organizations consisting predominately of White women. This likely contributes to their ability, as White women themselves, to fit within the organizational cultures of their organizations. One participant even described elements of organizational culture that she sees as specifically coded for White women saying,

> I think there's a very specific nonprofit White lady vibe that doesn't work for everyone . . . I think that my organization is very much like, well-intentioned White women is the word that comes to mind. Like you're going to be voting, you're going to be doing your research, you're going to be reading how to anti-racist. You're going to be doing all of that stuff and you might still slip up and the idea of talking about race makes you really uncomfortable, like deeply.

However, most participants did not themselves identify a link between the culture they described and White womanhood. Instead, they described a general awareness that their coworkers of Color likely faced challenges or barriers that the participants had difficulty identifying. One participant encapsulated this sentiment saying,

> I can't think of any examples of when I was treated differently [than a coworker of Color] or when I had a different outcome like that, but I definitely know that . . . my experience was definitely smoother. Like I rarely felt like my race was an issue for me in the workplace, but I know that my coworkers did.

This is to be expected, since culture, like privilege, is often difficult for those within it to deconstruct without significant scaffolding. It also indicates that participants were likely

working within a culture that is more welcoming to White woman than it was to POC, further

supporting the first participant's assertion that a subculture of White womanhood is active

within various participant's NPOs.

DEI as a Disrupter

Participants identified several values within the subculture of predominately White

woman-led NPOs, which include being helpful, supportive, team-oriented, communicative,

and committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. Participants shared a desire

for more effective DEI efforts and a belief that greater diversity would benefit NPOs.

However, participants also seemed dissatisfied or uncomfortable with specific DEI initiatives

within their organizations.

> It's not about the color of their skin, it's about who's going to do the job, and show
> up, and be kind to our clients and that's led to some additional diversity . . . which is
> important for the folks who we're serving. And you know there were a couple of
> boards for nonprofits that I served on who, one of their goals was to increase the
> diversity of their boards. So it just always felt very arbitrary, sitting in a room saying
> okay, what diverse people do we know?

It is also interesting to note that participants reported external pressure from funding sources

or community members as a primary factor in develop DEI initiatives within their NPOs, with

one participant saying,

> It definitely felt like when we're applying for grants or when funders are asking
> questions, there's always questions about diversity of your staff and the diversity of
> your leadership team, and it never feels very good to answer those questions when
> until six months ago, our leadership team was all older White women.

A few participants identified specific ways in which they felt DEI efforts and subsequent

increases in diversity made it more difficult to navigate organizational decision making

or threatened a stable organizational structure as one participant described saying,

> It's one decision I haven't made because my team is really split and I have a really
> diverse team . . . So I have a really amazing team with really valid and important

experiences and opinions and it's really hard!

Other's described experiences of emotional distress in their coworkers and themselves that were triggered by increasing awareness of their own and their colleagues' social locations and racial privilege or oppression saying,

> I had already gone through some of the White freakout that happens when you learn, oh my God, racism is still a thing now! And I'm probably perpetuating it and you feel terrible . . . I will say that I feel happy and glad that I had the opportunity, but it was hard. It was very very hard . . . and I know it was harder for my colleagues of Color.

Statements like these, illustrate the ways in which DEI efforts are seen as both necessary and culturally destabilizing, and participants shared notable ambivalence towards DEI initiatives. Their motivations to increase DEI within their NPOs was motivated by personal and organizational values of diversity as well as pressure from community members and funders. On the other hand, participants noted that diversity increased the potential for conflict within the NPO, made organizational decisions more difficult, and contributed to emotional disruption within the organization.

Managing Tension

The analysis uncovered a few specific psychological maneuvers that participants used to navigate the tension between their desires to both approach and avoid increasing diversity in the context of NPOs. The maneuvers are framed as statements of personal and professional values that participants identified. This is because participants themselves highlighted the importance of both remaining congruent with their own values and also displaying their adherence to those values in the workplace. One participant encapsulated this sentiment saying, "I think it was the dynamic between the White people in the organization. I think we all are trying to prove to each other that we aren't terrible people."

"I am Supportive"

The first maneuver is directly related to organizational goals to increase diversity in the workforce. To meet this goal, participants described seeking to "help" candidates of Color gain access to the NPO in ways that position the White woman as a benevolent supporter of the POC as this participant described,

> When I was at my last job as the COO, we had a woman of Color who applied for a job and we knew that she had been fired from her last position for lying about something. And I knew of her, I knew her a little bit. And I try to lead with my heart and lead with love, and something about her, I just knew we had to take a chance. And I stuck my neck out for her and she's still there and still thriving and doing amazing.

It is important to note the complex power dynamics at play in this example. The participant feels she is being supportive, but also feels she took a risk on behalf of the woman of Color that could easily exacerbate an existing power differential.

"I am a Hard Worker"

The next maneuver is rooted in a belief that NPOs are universally difficult and financially unrewarding environments, which one participant articulated saying,

> Nonprofit people, we're just built a little differently. We're obviously here because we care. We don't get paid the same as for-profit people. There must be something that draws us, and I really think it's that empathy and that desire to serve others.

Participants acknowledged that POC experience oppression and prejudice that increases the likelihood that they would burnout, with statements like, "I think that those challenges made my colleagues who were POC leave earlier in their careers . . . because it's too much for a lot of folks to take on, which I get." However, they also believe that "challenge" is inherent to the nonprofit sector. Therefore, anyone who burns out does so because they lack the motivation or conviction to remain regardless of the challenges they may face. Another participant described this saying,

> You know I picked organizations that mattered to me that I was really passionate about and committed to. So before I applied to a position I had to really like what they were doing. I would have a hard time doing that work if I kind of felt halfway about an organization. I'd want to be all in if I was going to do it.

Doubtless participants have worked hard to progress their careers, however, there is also a subtle implication in this value that people's success is a measure of their willingness to work hard without a nuanced acknowledgement of the additional challenges POC face in the workplace.

"I am Collaborative"

Participants also reported relying heavily on POC to communicate their NPO's mission to communities of Color. They based this dynamic in the rationale that White women cannot communicate as effectively with communities of Color. One participant explained this reasoning saying,

> That message has to come from someone that looks like them. That has their experience. So for me to walk into a community that doesn't know me, not only will I not be successful, that's just not relationship building. So what's important is whatever the message is, is using people who can actually be successful conveying that message.

This dynamic is often framed as collaboration or successful team building as another participant described,

> That's why it was important for me to build a team that has some nice diversity, and I knew that would strengthen the organization overall and I was able to do that. And I think we successfully recruited much more diverse mentors which was a goal of ours.

However, it creates an uneven dynamic wherein POC are responsible for increasing engagement with communities of Color, but do not have the power to fundamentally change the structure or offerings of the NPO to make it better serve the needs of the communities they solicit.

"I am Caring"

Finally, White women often engage in policing the behavior of other White women on behalf of POC. At times this support is solicited by a coworker of Color, typically in the

context of buffering that coworker from racism encountered when interfacing with the public as

one participant described,

> One of my coworkers was basically like, "you deal with this person" because racism was playing into the energy and the way the conversation was going. So basically, "Hey White lady, you deal with this White lady." We need to do that that way.

Another participant provided a similar example, saying,

> One of the organizers I managed, who was a Latina woman, was dealing with some of the volunteers who are older . . . and don't know that they're still a little bit racist. So managing those volunteer relationships so she didn't have to . . . And then having some of those hard conversations with them too of, like, if you're not down with the cause, then we don't need you to really work with us.

When not directly solicited by coworkers of Color, White women's efforts are often directed

toward removing a White woman who has done something racist from a position of authority

or from the organization entirely. One participant shared an example saying,

> And then, at the same time that this is all happening, there's a letter writing campaign within the organization to our CEO. Basically, calling her out for the institutional racism of the organization and asking her to step down.

Another participant echoed this sentiment with a similar example of her efforts to confront

another White woman for racially coded comments regarding aggression towards an

Indigenous woman.

> The person who's the head of [the organization] is also a woman. So it was a woman who did the hurt. And I recognized in that moment that I'm a woman here, too, and I need to call you out for, you know, basically treating another woman in the worst way possible.

Although these efforts often have the desired effect of removing a White woman from a

position of power or calling out racism, they also individualize acts of racism and leave little

room for corrective measures beyond the expulsion of the White woman being called out.

The Grounded Theory

The analysis of these core concepts uncovered the important role culture in NPOs plays in White women's motivations in and methods of interaction with POC. White women view NPOs as a protected bubble that allows them to develop professional careers without having to interact with overt sexism on a daily basis. They attribute the success of NPOs to employees' personal alignment with the values, mission, and culture of the organization. They also believe that NPOs are inherently fragile and could disintegrate with little warning. Because White women believe that maintaining an organization's culture maintains the stability of the NPO, thereby maintaining their protected space, a dilemma arises when the value of diversity is introduced. Efforts towards diversifying an organization inherently threaten the existing culture of that organization, which in turn is perceived as a threat by White women. However, DEI is a stated value of many NPOs and the White women therein. Thus, White women engage in a variety of maneuvers that serve to symbolically pursue DEI without altering the fundamental culture of the organization or disrupting the status quo.

NPOs as White Women's Spaces

NPOs represent a protected social and professional space for White women where they feel protected from the overt sexism that they associate with for-profit settings. Although participants typically did not racialize NPOs, they did note that POC seemed to have more difficulty achieving the career growth they noted amongst White women. This important distinction is discussed in greater detail later but is necessary to mention when describing NPOs as spaces of comfort for *White* women. Participants' reflections on the core concept of NPOs as protection from sexism related this in terms of ease of career progress and recognition that there are simply more women than men in the nonprofit sector. NPOs are

spaces where White women not only feel comfortable, but also believe they have relatively easy access to institutional power. They believe these spaces allow them to pursue their career goals without sacrificing their personal and private lives. For White women, who feel pressured to "lean in" to attaining professional success while also remaining a very active and caring presence in their personal lives, organizations that facilitate women's career growth in these ways are valuable.

Perceptions of Threat

However, White women also perceive these valuable spaces as fragile and under constant threat both existentially and practically. Participants described fears that external political pressure could impact both governmental funding and popular support for their organizations. They were also concerned that even amongst private donors, funding could be withdrawn at any time. The intense focus on fund raising shared by many participants speaks to an underlying fear that budget cuts could imperil their employment status, career opportunities, and even the continuation of their organizations. Thus, White women perceive themselves to be in positions of relatively little control over the futures of their organizations while also causing them to feel that those organizations are under constant threat of disappearing.

Although participants did not directly connect funding and the power it hold over NPOs to social hierarchy, it is worth noting that wealth and political power are disproportionately possessed by White, upper-class men. This adds an additional layer to White women's perceptions of threat because not only would the disappearance of NPOs lead to the loss of their protected spaces, but the loss of those spaces would also be directly due to the withdrawal of resources by White men, who are the same group White women seek to

protect themselves from in the workplace. This power differential sets up a dynamic wherein White women feel the need to avoid alienating White men in order to maintain their organizations, which in turn protect them from some degree of sexism. White women are in a constant state of fear that their income and their ability to work within the protected space that is an NPO could disappear at any time. This triggers a natural desire to protect and stabilize the organization.

Mission and Culture as Protection

White women see the strong alignment between their personal values and the NPO's mission as both a primary means of differentiating NPOs from for-profit companies and of protecting the organization from external threats. Participants drew a strong connection between ensuring that donors, volunteers, and the community understood and supported the organization's stated mission and values and the continued stability of the NPO. By ensuring that as many community members and potential donors as possible understand the value that the NPO adds by fulfilling its mission, the women believe they are increasing the likelihood that others will donate their time or money to support the organization. This conceptualization of the mission as a central means of stabilizing and therefore ensuring the continuation of the NPO leads White women to become highly invested in embodying and evangelizing the mission.

The desire to present a united and strong commitment to the organization's mission also fosters an impulse to monitor employees' ability to successfully demonstrate their own alignment with the mission and values of the organization. Participants described this in terms of gatekeeping participation in their NPOs based on other's perceived dedication to the mission or testing existing employees' ability to justify perceived mismatches between their

own identity and the values of the NPO. This type of monitoring is difficult, however, because organizational missions and even values statements are abstract and can therefore be fulfilled in a variety of ways, some of which may be directly contradictory to one another. This can be a problem because White women place a high value on homogeneity in perceived engagement with the mission.

Culture as Mission

To address this challenge, White women do not actually monitor personal understanding of and dedication to a stated mission. Instead, they seek visible signs, including a person's social location and ways of interacting, to determine whether a peer is appropriately performing investment. This distinction matters because in pursuit of promoting the mission, White women are actually enforcing alignment with the organization's cultural values and practices. The organizational culture likely reflects the organization's mission and values, but is much more all-encompassing, subjective, and homogeneous. This mindset also inculcates a protectiveness of the existing culture and the power structures embedded therein in the name of maintaining the organization and through it a safe space for White women.

Furthermore, participants identified specific cultural elements that they either explicitly or implicitly tied to a subculture of White womanhood. One participant labeled these elements as a "specific nonprofit White lady vibe" that they felt was prominent in the organizations they had worked with. The subculture that emerged from participants valued being supportive, hardworking, collaborative, and caring. It also included visible dedication to increasing diversity, especially racial diversity, while being uncomfortable with deeper discussion of race and privilege. This subculture serves to make NPOs comfortable spaces for White women. They naturally align with many of the organization's cultural expectations

based solely on their social location, whereas POC must mitigate the mismatch between their own social location and a culture of White womanhood to be perceived as equally suited to their roles within the organization. By merging a culture of White womanhood with conceptualizations of mission alignment and therefore safety, White women further reinforce their own positions of power within the NPO.

The Dilemma of Diversity

This framework would imply that White women are invested in excluding both White men and POC from NPOs in order to maintain their sense of safety and cultural homogeneity, but participants presented a more nuanced dynamic where race is concerned. Participants consistently asserted "diversity" as a personal and organizational value, but also found concrete organizational DEI efforts stressful and ineffective. This author suggests that increasing diversity fundamentally destabilizes the homogenous cultural structure White women have constructed in their organizations and is therefore perceived as a threat. This dynamic sets up a dilemma for White women. They hold a cultural value of promoting DEI work, but the resulting increase in diversity challenges that same culture and therefore threatens the perceived stability of the organization itself.

Approaching DEI

Participants shared a variety of motivations for wanting to increase DEI in their organizations including personal values of community, care, and support, organizational missions related to equity, and external pressure from the community and funding sources. On a cultural level, pursuit of DEI aligns with White women's values and therefore engaging in DEI efforts is congruent with their self-conceptualization. By striving to make an organization more inclusive and diverse White women believe they are extending compassion, support, and

community towards those with less privilege. Participants also identified the value of a diverse staff in connecting with the communities their NPOs hoped to serve and support, but whom they themselves had difficulty forming relationships with on the basis of race. This ties back to White women's belief that strong community support protects NPOs and thus themselves.

Finally, participants drew a strong connection between both governmental and private funding sources and their organizations' abilities to demonstrated diversity amongst staff and board members. White women are aware that being able to demonstrate demographic diversity within their organizations or at least efforts towards increasing that diversity is a significant mechanism for ensuring the financial stability and growth of their NPOs. Thus, there are many ways in which pursuing DEI both reinforces the culture of White womanhood as it appears within NPOs and contributes to the structural and cultural stability of the organizations. However, it is important to note that the value of diversity is closely tied to the visibility of that diversity both within and outside the organization, not necessarily in structural changes prompted by new perspectives and insights.

Avoiding Diversity

This distinction between projections of visible diversity versus diversity of thought and experience suggests that although supporting DEI efforts may be seen as a cultural value that protects public perception of and funding for the NPO and White women's conceptualizations of themselves, the increased diversity and privilege awareness that comes along with those efforts is less comfortable. Participants shared examples of both personal and structural challenges that resulted directly from increased diversity within their organizations. On the personal level, White women, when they become aware of their racial privilege, respond with emotional turmoil that can take many forms and which one participant encapsulated as a "freak

out." This type of highly emotional response makes the work environment uncomfortable for both White women and their coworkers of Color, who must now navigate their coworkers' emotional volatility and likely defensiveness. From a structural perspective participants described an increase in conflict following DEI efforts due to an influx of new perspectives and insights. Significantly, this conflict is not seen as productive or generative, but is seen as a barrier to organizational decision making. Both these responses, increased emotionality across the organization and increased conflict, represent threats to the existing culture and status quo, and therefore are perceived as threatening by White women.

As a result, White women face a dilemma regarding DEI within their organizations. On one hand, visible DEI efforts can increase an NPO's stability by improving funding streams and reinforcing White women's cultural values. However, introducing diversity of thought and awareness of privilege is seen as destabilizing to the organizational culture and can even hinder effective decision making. Thus, White women in NPOs seek to both approach and avoid increasing the diversity within their organizations in an attempt to maximize the cultural stability and safety of the organizations and ultimately themselves.

Maneuvers towards Resolution

Towards this end White women engage in maneuvers that attempt to increase demographic diversity while also maintaining the status quo and culture of White womanhood present within their organizations. These maneuvers are dysconscious and function as rationalizations that uphold the underlying cultural dominance of White women, while demonstrating a surface level effort towards increasing diversity. The maneuvers are framed as values statements because this is how they are perceived by the White women who utilize

them. They also serve to demonstrate personal alignment with organizational values that participants identified as generally universal across NPOs.

"I am Supportive"

This value relates to participants descriptions of "helping" POC gain access to their organizations. In these interactions, the White woman believes she is taking on some sort of risk or burden in order to allow the POC to access an opportunity they otherwise would not have. This dynamic reinforces a social hierarchy and positions White women as gatekeepers and benefactors to the POC they choose to support. It also allows White women to reinforce their perceptions of their own benevolence while undercutting their belief that their coworkers of Color poses sufficient skill to be successful within the NPO without additional assistance.

"I am a Hard Worker"

White women consider themselves hard working and NPOs challenging and sometimes exploitative work environments. Although they recognize that their coworkers of Color burn out more quickly and acknowledge that this is likely due to racial oppression in some way, White women still believe that their own success is due to dedication and ability to withstand the challenges of working at an NPO. There is an implied belief that if their coworkers of Color were more dedicated or hard working, then they too would have persisted. This framework allows White women to place the onus for leaving the organization on the level of dedication in POC who leave, rather than on a culture that places an additional burden on POC.

"I am Collaborative"

Collaboration and team building were frequently cited values amongst the participants and were specifically framed as efforts to build racially diverse teams that could communicate more effectively with different groups within the community. White women perceive this type

of collaboration as promoting unity across the team with a shared goal of communicating the organization's mission. However, they also note that their social location as White women is a barrier to establishing the types of relationships they seek within communities of Color, and employees of Color are therefore recruited to fill an organizational gap specifically via their own racial identity. It is important to note that this maneuver positions employees of Color as liaisons who share the NPO's mission and build support within communities of Color without granting them institutional power to better align the NPO's culture with the communities who's support it solicits. This allows White women to feel that the organization is both diverse and connected with the broader community, without requiring the organization to adapt its culture to reflect increased diversity.

"I am Caring"

This value refers to a collection of policing behaviors that White women direct towards other White women who have done something racist or harmful towards employees of Color. This is a particularly nuanced maneuver because at times these interventions are requested by the employee of Color as a means of buffering themselves from oppression and at times White women self-initiate these behaviors. To be clear, the dysconscious element of this maneuver is not seeking to correct racist behavior in other White women or attempting to buffer POC from oppression and racism. It is that by focusing the majority of their energy on punishing or excluding individuals who have done obvious harm, White women often avoid addressing the systemic racism that facilitates individual acts of racism. In so doing, White women position themselves as active participants in combating oppression but continue to uphold the existing status quo within their organizations.

Summary

To review, White women see NPOs as protected spaces that allow them to pursue careers without experiencing as much sexism in the workplace. They attribute this protection to existing within the nonprofit sector as opposed to the for-profit sector and identify a strong emphasis on organizational mission as a central aspect of differentiation between the two sectors. Although White women feel comfortable and protected within NPOs due to an over-representation of women, they also believe that NPOs are structurally fragile due to their reliance on grants and donations for funding. They also perceive them as under constant threat of disappearing due to political and financial pressures. This conceptualization of threat inculcates a strong protectiveness of their organizations in White women.

White women see strong personal alignment with and communication of the organization's mission to the broader community as their primary tools for maintaining the stability of NPOs and therefore their protected career spaces. Significantly, White women merge their understanding of the organization's mission with the culture of the organization. They end up enforcing alignment with the organization's culture in an attempt to ensure that coworkers are appropriately embodying the mission. Additionally, a subculture of White womanhood is built into many NPOs. Thus, White women end up enforcing conformity with a narrowly defined organizational culture with many features that are tailored for White women as they seek to maintain the stability of their NPOs.

A dilemma arises when White women seek to pursue DEI efforts. Many White women and NPOs overtly value the pursuit of greater diversity within their organizations. They are attracted by personal values that align with diversity, improved community engagement, and funding streams that require evidence of DEI work to access. All these elements are perceived

as further stabilizing the organization. However, White women also associate increased

diversity with increased conflict and emotionality within the organization. These things are

seen as very threatening to the culture and therefore safety of the NPO by White women. As a

result, White women seek symbolic efforts towards diversity while also maintaining a status

quo that centers the power and perspectives of White women.

   The analysis uncovered a few specific dysconscious maneuvers that White women use

within the context of NPOs to address this dilemma. The maneuvers all center values that

participants perceived as generalizable across different NPOs and function to maintain White

women's conceptualization of themselves as benevolent and dedicated. They also promote

proximity to POC without making substantial structural or cultural changes to the organization

itself.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Contextualizing the Findings

As described in the rationale, grounded theorists complete a significant portion of the literature review after completing data analysis in order to address specific themes and findings that may have unexpectedly emerged during analysis. The goal of the initial literature review is to develop sensitivity to topics likely to arise during data collection and a broad understanding of current literature related to the research questions. The second stage of literature review seeks to situate the proposed theory within the relevant literature with a higher degree of specificity (Dunne, 2011). The aim of this section is to connect key elements of the theory to existing literature and provide context for any concepts not addressed in the initial literature review.

NPOs as Safe Spaces

This study indicates that White women see NPOs as protected spaces that allow them to build careers without the need to navigate as much sexism as they would in the for-profit sector, which has traditionally been seen as a more masculine domain than the nonprofit sector. To better understand this perception, one needs to understand how White women experience sexism as well as the ways in which they seek safety from sexism. By considering ways in which White women have historically carved out and maintained professional "safe spaces," on can see how modern NPOs can serve a similar function.

Perceptions of Threat and Safety

Please note that this section focuses heavily on White women's *perceptions* of sexism. This is to better describe the emotional frameworks that informs White women's internal responses to threat. The use of the word 'perception' is not intended to dismiss the very real

experiences of sexism that women face, but instead is meant to signal the complex interplay between lived experience, expectations, and understanding of one's own agency or lack thereof when confronted with sexism.

Women's perceptions of sexism in the workplace are primarily focused on sexism as a factor that reduces their earning potential or ability to gain formal power within an organization through promotions (Y. Lee, 2014). As women have become an established population making up approximately 50% of the workforce in the United States, they have become increasingly aware that despite higher levels of education and experience, they can also expect to earn less both over the course of their career and when in comparable roles than their male counterparts (Zhao, 2020). Historically, efforts to correct for this phenomenon, termed the gender pay gap, have focused on improving parity of pay in specific roles (Randev, 2024). However, as research into systemic barriers to career progression, also known as the glass ceiling phenomenon, become more nuanced and information widely available, women have become increasingly aware of the burden overlapping expectations of professional and family life place upon them (Nuru & Arendt, 2019; Randev, 2024; Zhao, 2020).

This burgeoning awareness of complex, interlocking, systemic forms of sexism associated with employment, demonstrates a shift from earlier popular conceptualizations of sexism as the result of a preponderance of sexist individuals in power (Zhao, 2020). Systemic oppression is often perceived as particularly difficult to address and can trigger a desire to create "safe spaces," or spaces that are protected bubbles for marginalized people to avoid or rest from experiences of oppression (Anderson, 2021). It is important to note that Anderson (2021) is careful to distinguish safe spaces, which constitute an insular refuge from perceived threat, from "brave spaces" which focus on developing resources and strategies to combat

oppression. This distinction is important because White women do not only feel threatened by sexism perpetrated by White men.

White women have also historically held a position of symbolic fragility in danger of sexual and existential harm from men of Color, especially Black men (Harris, 2020). This positioning of White women often was and remains today an intentional mechanism of White supremacy to justify violence towards POC in the name of "protecting" White women (Matias, 2016; Schuller, 2021; Smilan-Goldstein, 2023). White women have internalized this self-conceptualization, and as a result, often perceive both men and women of Color as more aggressive and threatening than White men (Harris, 2020). Similarly, although White women believe White men are capable of and responsible for both sexism and sexual violence, they consider proximity to White men and masculinized representations of authority more protective than threatening (Matias, 2016; Smilan-Goldstein, 2023). Taken together, these perceptions define White women's safe spaces as ones that are separate from, but in close proximity to, White men and that are exclusionary of POC. Significantly, this type of "safe space" fails to actually protect White women from all but the most overt forms of sexism, while primarily providing cognitive safety to continue engaging in and perpetuating racism (Anderson, 2021; Matias, 2016).

Carving Out Spaces

As the previous section suggests, White women's perceptions of threat and safety are shaped by a complex interplay between their agent and target ranks. This complicates the definition of a "safe space" for White women because they perceive the threat of oppression in their target rank, women, as the same as the threat of psychic discomfort in their agent rank,

White people. To better understand their efforts towards a "safe space" one must disentangle these perceptions and address them separately.

A Note on Safe Spaces

Current literature addresses an ongoing and significant debate over the legitimacy of safe spaces and their ability to meaningfully protect marginalized people from prejudice and oppression (Anderson, 2021; Liu et al., 2023). Brosschot et al. (2016) puts forward a useful perspective on stress response and safety that addresses this issue. They assert that the stress response is best conceptualized as baseline that is moderated by signals of safety rather than the absence of discrete stressors stating that, "the absence of threat does not equal the presence of safety" (p. 31). This is particularly true for minoritized groups who experience frequent stressors and reduced signals of safety in their daily life due to "minority stress" (Diamond et al., 2021). Safe spaces seek to remove the stressors, often by dictating expectations for interpersonal interaction, even if successful, these efforts fail to foster signals of safety and rarely result in experiences of true safety for target groups (Anderson, 2021; Brosschot et al., 2018). Thus, it is very difficult or potentially impossible for women to truly escape the stress associated with sexism by the development of NPOs as safe spaces. This results in a perpetual sense of stress and impulse to respond defensively to perceived threats. However, their White privilege, which is not a source of chronic stress, likely grants White women the power to avoid or eliminate stressors associated with confronting their whiteness. Thereby, allowing them to craft a space and culture that does provide signals of safety within the context of their agent rank at the expense of POC (Liu et al., 2023).

Based on this conceptualization of safety, White women must do three things to create and maintain a professional "safe space." They must limit the presence of men in the space,

maintain the positive regard of White men, and limit the presence of POC, including women of Color, in the space. By limiting contact with and maintaining the support of White men, White women seek to reduce their sense of threat in their context as women, and by limiting the presence of POC they increase signals of safety within the context of their agent rank. They pursue this by carefully modulating the culture of the space to make it unappealing and nonthreatening to White men, and uninviting to POC.

Unappealing

As White women began entering the workforce in larger numbers in the early 20th century, they were funneled towards low-prestige careers traditionally associated with the feminine realms of caregiving and child rearing, namely nursing and early education (Bauer, 2021). Upper-class White women with wealth and status also took on roles as fundraisers for various causes and benevolent organizations associated with caring for vulnerable populations (Dale, 2017; Penna, 2018). The classing of these domains as feminine not only provided an narrow entry point for women into the workplace, it also made such spaces unappealing to men (Puzio & Valshtein, 2022; Scholes & McDonald, 2022). When women began entering a broader range of careers and demonstrated an intention to continue pursuing growth in those careers throughout their lifespans in the 1970s and 80s, researchers noted a consistent trend of men leaving fields perceived to be popular with women as well as a reduction in wages for roles previously held by men (Coventry, 1999). This phenomenon is referred to as feminization and persists today with the most feminized fields being most likely to be actively avoided by men and simultaneously pursued by women (Puzio & Valshtein, 2022; Scholes & McDonald, 2022). Highly feminized fields, such as human services, education, nursing, and other caregiving fields, are dramatically over-represented in the nonprofit sector and are

considered a leading causal factor for the over-representation of women in the nonprofit

sector as well (Coventry, 1999; Y. Lee, 2014). Essentially, women's prevalence in a field

discourages men from entering that field, and the nonprofit sector is particularly rich with

both feminized careers and women and, therefore, unappealing to men in comparison to the

for-profit sector.

Nonthreatening

However, it is not enough for a space to be unappealing to White men, it must also be

nonthreatening in order to maintain their perceived protection. This is primarily achieved by

promoting the position of White men at the top of the socio-political hierarchy. Feminization

of a professional space is not only defined by a prevalence of women and a reduction in

wages, but also by the consolidation of men into high-power positions over majority women

subordinates (Coventry, 1999). In the field of education this can be seen in men holding a

disproportionate number of positions as principals and superintendents, while women make up

the majority of teachers, and in NPOs it can be seen as men holding board and executive

positions, while women fill most other roles (Bauer, 2021; Heckler, 2019). This structure

allows White men to maintain control over organizations, while also minimizing most women

employee's direct contact with them (Mandel, 2013). White women also have a long history of

actively courting the support of White men during the establishment of NPOs (Johnson, 2017;

Ojeda & Wall, 2023; Penna, 2018). This allows White men to influence the mission and

activities of the NPO in ways that align with their own interests and which can be extremely

difficult to change even once the founders of the organization are no longer in formal positions

of power (English & Peters, 2011; Iyer & Achia, 2021).

Uninviting

Finally, a safe space for White women must also exclude POC. This serves to both reinforce White women's position as supportive of White men's supremacy and to limit White women's contact with POC. Since overt racial discrimination is both illegal and out of alignment with White women's cultural values of care and collaboration, this exclusion manifests as a subculture that "just happens" to be uninviting to POC, particularly women of Color (Brewer & Dundes, 2018). This subculture is characterized by prevalent microaggressions, the valuing of White perspectives over those of POC, and downplaying or capitalizing on POC's experiences of oppression in the workplace to promote feelings of racial atonement for White coworkers (Badenhorst, 2021; Nuru & Arendt, 2019). It serves to maintain a comfortable environment for White women while alienating and excluding POC.

Overlapping Cultures

It is now time to make explicit the culture of White womanhood alluded to throughout the previous section. During the late 19th and 20th centuries White women came to hold a powerful, politically symbolic position in the United States (Pascoe, 1990). This symbolification was far reaching, and intrinsically tied with the development of early nonprofit and benevolent organizations (Addams, 1899; Penna, 2018). To understand the connection between the culture of White womanhood and NPO cultures, one must first understand the values the symbolic White woman represented and how those values have been carried forward into modern White women's conceptualizations of themselves.

Culture of White Womanhood

The cult of True Womanhood, popularized throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries is the foundation upon which the modern culture of White womanhood rests (Bauer,

2021; Rehman & Hussain, 2016). The cult of True Womanhood held up four central pillars embodied by the ideal women: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness, all of which were defined in relation to White men and the ways in which White women could be maximally useful to them (Rehman & Hussain, 2016). Although, this tight linkage to White men has become less overt and the themes of True Womanhood more diffuse, they still appear in the ways White women interact with others, particularly White men and POC.

Piety

The first pillar, piety, was historically embodied by dedication to Christian religious teachings and most importantly, Christian moral correctness, which the White woman was encouraged to promote in both herself and others (Rehman & Hussain, 2016). This pillar was particularly focused on converting or correcting others behavior in order to align it with the White woman's own worldview and held strong overtones of benevolence (Addams, 1899; Bauer, 2021). Over the course of the 20th century, this pillar shifted to take on less religiously bound views of correct behavior and instead began to present whiteness as the ideal, giving rise to the White savior (Pascoe, 1990; Vera & Gordon, 2003). White saviors bring their superior knowledge and compassion to an othered group in order to "help" community members mold themselves into a culture of whiteness (Badenhorst, 2021; Vera & Gordon, 2003). In so doing, the White women reify their position as morally superior and benevolent educators of cultural correctness to others.

Purity

The second pillar, purity, refers not only to sexual purity, which an ideal woman reserved for her husband, but also the perfecting of her character and appearance in order to make herself maximally appealing to White men (Rehman & Hussain, 2016). Although, modern discourse

regarding women's sexuality is heavily influenced by this ideal, sexuality is less pertinent to this study than the pursuit of perfectionism and policing of other women that have evolved from early conceptualizations of purity (Kanai, 2020). White women frequently engage in the monitoring and criticism of other White women's behavior in order to ensure that other women are fitting within the ideal (Cossens & Jackson, 2020; Kanai, 2020; H. Lee, 2023). This enforcement of perfectionism and purity of alignment with a specific identity, such as "feminist" or "antiracist" is particularly prevalent in activist spaces and serves to exclude other White women who do not sufficiently fit the prescribed mold from the group (Badenhorst, 2021; Kanai, 2020). This pillar is also frequently weaponized against women of Color (Brewer & Dundes, 2018).

Domesticity

The third pillar is domesticity. This pillar identifies the home as the special domain of White women, one that they are solely responsible for maintaining. Furthermore, the home is also expected to be a "refuge from the world" for White men (Rehman & Hussain, 2016, p. 47). Therefore, the White woman is expected to maintain the home as a place of maximum comfort for the White men in her life, even at the expense of her own comfort. Throughout the course of the 20th century this virtue of sacrificing one's own comfort for the comfort of another blends with Christian religious imagery to present personal sacrifice for the comfort of others as a form of idealized martyrdom (Larrabee, 2016; Pascoe, 1990). White women carry forward this value of martyrdom as both a burden placed on them by society and a point of pride that often manifests in taking on uncompensated and unappreciated labor in personal and professional realms (Bandali, 2020; Kim et al., 2018).

Submissiveness

The final pillar is submissiveness and specifically refers to submissiveness to White men (Rehman & Hussain, 2016). This pillar is embodied by an uncomplaining and pleasant demeanor and active support of White men's goals. This pillar not only establishes White women's intentional positioning of themselves in a position support to White men above all others in deep cultural practices, but also informs modern White women's values of perceived niceness and avoidance of overt conflict (H. Lee, 2023; Miller, 1991). White women often value appearances of niceness and politeness over direct critique and collaboration. This can cause them to avoid situations that may spark conflict, to police the tone of others during disagreements, and to discount impassioned comments and responses from POC based solely on the White woman's perception of their demeanor (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Lee, 2023)

White Women as Social Symbols

A closer inspection of the cult of True Womanhood uncovers its close links to the perpetuation of White supremacy by locating White women as a buffer between White men and POC within the social hierarchy (Bauer, 2021; Matias, 2016). This position is further solidified by the symbolification of White women as the moral and ethical center of both the home and the broader community (Pascoe, 1990; Rehman & Hussain, 2016). Through this process White women become benevolent and caring figures who seek to care for and protect those considered weaker, thereby positioning themselves as "helpers" to those below them on the social hierarchy. However, they also become a marker of the highest degree of power permitted to anyone who is not both White and male and whose position of power should not be threatened under penalty of invoking the violent protection of White men (Matias, 2010; Schuller, 2021).

NPOs and Neoliberalism

The nonprofit sector is vast, and it is inaccurate to assert that there is one collective set of cultural values that all NPOs ascribe to. However, NPOs are not merely social organizations, they are also political due to their position as private entities that fulfill societal needs not otherwise met by governmental organizations (Alexander & Fernandez, 2021; Penna, 2018).

Furthermore, any NPO that relies on grants of governmental funding is required to meet organizational specifications that align with governmental expectations in order to receive that funding (Weisinger et al., 2016). The prevailing political theories in the US since the 1930s have been liberalism and then neoliberalism (Alexander & Fernandez, 2021). These theories are very similar and have had a tremendous impact on the shape of the nonprofit sector (Penna, 2018).

Neoliberal Values

Neoliberal values are a combination of liberal pro-social values and a belief that social good should be provided within the context of a capitalistic free-market economic structure (Beattie et al., 2019). This combination translates into personal values of individualism, fairness, openness, benevolence, multiculturalism, and growth through commodification of the self with a particular focus on individual advancement though personal effort (Beattie et al., 2019; Hunter, 2021; Laiduc et al., 2024). However, the inherent conflict between pursuing collective goods and personal advancement within a capitalistic society leads neoliberal values to be expressed vaguely so as to avoid highlighting this internal contradiction (Laiduc et al., 2024). Furthermore, neoliberalism conflates personal values with marketing (Ferraro et al., 2023). This leads to both NPOs and donors who use the vague language of neoliberal values to

assert alignment with prosocial views without doing deeper work to truly support those assertions (Ferraro et al., 2023; Hunter, 2021).

Power Dynamics

As organizations expected to reflect these neoliberal values in order to access funding, NPOs are in a tenuous position. They are expected to promote the vague values of openness, fairness, multiculturalism, and personal growth within their organizations and the communities they serve, but they are also increasingly reliant on funding from outside those same communities for survival (Ojeda & Wall, 2023). Prior to the rise of neoliberalism, NPOs, particularly smaller organizations with close ties to the local community, typically prioritized community defined needs over funding sources when the two were in conflict (Weisinger et al., 2016). However, over the past 40 years, NPOs have increasingly prioritized funding sources over community needs or concerns (Alexander & Fernandez, 2021). This system of prioritization brings NPOs increasingly more in line with the sources of power and oppression they seek to insulate the populations they serve from and since financial and political power are dominated by White men, slowly aligns NPOs with cultures of White supremacy (Hunter, 2021; Laiduc et al., 2024).

The Overlap

Thus, it becomes evident that NPOs hold a similar position within American political power structures as White women hold within social hierarchies. This is to say that much like White women hold a position of subservience to White men and in turn engage in the oppression of POC in order to maintain that position, NPOs are beholden to those with political and financial power for funding and often end up sacrificing care to the communities they serve in order to maintain access to those funds. Given these commonalities, it becomes

clear that the culture of White womanhood would thrive within the nonprofit sector not only due to White women's central role in the development of the sector, but also due to the similarities between social and political power dynamics in the nonprofit sector.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The synthesis of the culture of White womanhood and neoliberalism in NPOs can be seen in participants reactions to DEI efforts in their NPOs. Participants shared ambivalence regarding efforts to increase diversity, often specifically racial diversity, within their organizations.

Through a lens of critical analysis, this tension is a manifestation of the tenuous position White women and NPOs hold within their overlapping power structures, with both seeking to enact benevolence upon those with less power, while avoiding imperiling their proximity to and support from those with more power.

Desire for Diversity

Motivations for White women to engage in DEI efforts at NPOs arise on systemic, cultural, and individual levels and are numerous. This section expands on the reasons most directly related to participants comments on the subject.

Financial Pressures

NPOs, and by extension the White women who make up a large portion of their employees, face significant external pressure to be perceived as promoting DEI within their organizations. This pressure originated with the enacting of antidiscrimination laws during the Civil Rights era that required all businesses, including NPOs, to avoid discrimination during the hiring process (Weisinger et al., 2016). Affirmative action efforts have built upon this foundation by requiring NPOs to demonstrate various efforts and progress toward diversifying

in order to qualify for grants. These pressures are often focused on the recruitment and hiring processes and are intended to incentivize the hiring of more diverse employees in the hopes that doing so will eventually engender a culture of self-perpetuating diversity. Private donors also frequently evaluate NPOs on the basis of their DEI efforts (Ferraro et al., 2023). Additionally, the rise of "personal bands" has further incentivized donors to carefully evaluate the organizations they patronize to ensure the organizations contribute to their own brand image. Even individuals donating relatively small sums of money without the intention of using those donations to construct a brand, have recently begun scrutinizing not only NPOs missions and activities, but also their internal structures before donating (Van Dijk et al., 2019). This is done to ensure that the NPOs are congruent with the donors' values both internally and externally. Thus, funding from a variety of sources has become increasingly tied to the visibility of diversity within NPOs.

Personal Values

Obviously, many White women are interested in increasing diversity due to genuine personal beliefs that the inclusion of diverse people in NPOs improves the organizations and benefits the communities they serve. However, from a cultural perspective, White women are heavily invested in being perceived as a "good person" (Badenhorst, 2021). In the context of NPOs, that means visibly embodying some combination of values associated with the culture of White womanhood and with neoliberalism (H. Lee, 2023). DEI efforts often align with multiple of these values, including White saviorship, martyrdom, benevolence, openness, and multiculturalism (Badenhorst, 2021; Iyer, 2022; Weisinger et al., 2016). White women are motivated to cultivate the appearance of goodness, or moral correctness, for a few reasons. The first is that being perceived as good aligns with White women's internalized sense of

themselves as examples of ideal womanhood and therefore reduces cognitive dissonance between the actual and ideal selves (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Pascoe, 1990). The second is that being seen as good by the group not only avoids purity policing from other White women, but also facilitates relationship building and maintenance with other in the group (Kanai, 2020; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Weisinger et al., 2016).

Threat of Diversity

As highly motivated as many White women are to engage in DEI efforts, the resulting increase in diversity among employees at an NPO is often perceived as threatening due to its potential to disrupt the stability of the existing culture. Diversity is also seen as threatening because it can increase the potential for conflict within an organization.

Diversity Threatens Cultural Stability

The stated goal of DEI initiatives is to ultimately reduce the oppression that marginalized groups face (Iyer, 2022). This goal is inherently threatening to systems and cultures designed to maintain the power of a specific group through the oppression of others. The culture of White womanhood is designed to maintain whiteness and maleness at the top of the social hierarchy, with White women just below (Hamilton et al., 2019; Harris, 2020). NPOs structurally maintain the supremacy of wealthy donors and those with political power, both groups dominated by White men, in order to themselves survive (Ojeda & Wall, 2023). Therefore, the inclusion of people invested in reducing the power of those groups, such as POC, is naturally threatening to cultures constructed to maintain that power.

Diversity Increases Conflict

Furthermore, increasing diversity in an organization is perceived by those within the organization as a catalyst for increased interpersonal conflict and that increase is interpreted as

threatening (Arbatli et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2013). It is important to note that conflict in an organization is not necessarily destructive and has the potential to strengthen an organization over time (Arbatli et al., 2020) However, when that conflict is directed towards existing power structures, it is perceived as threatening whether proposed changes would potentially benefit the organization or not (Martins et al., 2013). Since diversity, particularly racial diversity, is likely to threaten the privileged position of White women, associated conflict is consistently perceived as threatening. Additionally, White women hold a strong cultural value of niceness and avoidance of conflict, which makes them even more likely to view conflict as threatening (Hamilton et al., 2019).

The Maneuvers as Dysconsciousness

As participants attempted to navigate the psychic discomfort of approaching diversity while attempting to maintain that status quo within their organizations, they often returned to personal value statements and examples of embodying those values as a method of dysconsciousness (King, 1991). This framing fulfills two purposes. The first is to shift attention away from broader systems of power and refocus on the individual. The second is to maintain the emotional comfort of the person deploying maneuver (Vargas & Saetermoe, 2024). This study's findings section framed the maneuvers in terms of values statements because that is how they were perceived by participants within the cultural context of White-woman led nonprofits. In this section, those statements are linked with more general dysconscious strategies in order to illustrate their underlying implications.

Paternalism – "I am Supportive"

The participants' value of, "I am supportive" when directed towards colleagues of Color is often framed in terms of the White woman taking on some sort of risk or burden so

that a person of Color has the same opportunities that the White woman was able to obtain without special support. The White woman feels as though she has done something kind by "supporting" a person of Color's career progression by sharing some portion of her own power. However, the White woman has also set up a dynamic that places the person of Color in a position of being indebted to the White woman due to the efforts the White woman took to support them while also building in an assumption that the person of Color may not actually be qualified for their position because they required assistance from the White woman to attain it. In so doing, the status quo, with White women in positions of power over POC, is maintained, even as POC are recruited.

This sets up a dynamic of paternalism and raises themes of White saviorship. As previously discussed, White saviorship is a hallmark of the culture of White womanhood as well as a fundamental tenant of colonialism (Pascoe, 1990; Schuller, 2021). It is most often portrayed as a dynamic between a White individual and a group of indigenous people or POC that the White individual befriends and then single handedly saves from a threat (Vera & Gordon, 2003). White women have engaged in this form of paternalism since the inception of charity organizations in the late 18th Century and regularly engage in it today (Addams, 1899; Badenhorst, 2021; Matias, 2016). Paternalism serves to maintain protect the ego and power of the one deploying it by reframing condescension and infantilization as benevolence (Matias, 2016).

Meritocracy – "I am a Hard Worker"

When participants described themselves as hard workers, it was typically in the context of overcoming job specific challenges such as learning a new skill or reaching a high performance goal. Participants were also able to acknowledge that their coworkers of Color

likely faced additional challenges that impacted their ability to be productive at work. However, participants framed these additional challenges only as a cause for burnout in their coworkers of Color, not as demonstrations of increased effort towards their job. Essentially, when defining which work "counts" towards job success, White women uncritically limited the definition of work to exclude the additional burdens of oppression that they themselves do not bear, even when they were aware that those burdens appeared in the workplace.

This careful framing of standards to avoid acknowledgement of the additional efforts oppressed groups undertake to perform at the same level as privileged peers is called meritocracy (Augoustinos et al., 2005). Meritocracy is a hallmark of White supremacist culture because it is highly effective in justifying the failure of oppressed people to attain the same level of success in a given area as those with privilege (Putman, 2017). In seeking to hold everyone to the same narrow definition of effort, meritocracy purports to reward all equally based on effort while quietly disenfranchising those who must expend energy to overcome challenges outside the strict bounds of job performance (Augoustinos et al., 2005; Putman, 2017). Thus, White women can attribute their success to their own very real effort, while sidestepping the additional effort a coworker of Color likely expended to achieve the same level of success.

Tokenism – "I am Collaborative"

Participants often describe themselves as "collaborative," particularly when discussing their interactions with coworkers of Color or those who held other target identities not shared with the participant. Upon further examination, collaboration and teamwork in these dynamics took on a familiar pattern wherein White women would lead teams with coworkers of Color and a goal of increasing engagement with communities of Color. Teamwork often consisted of

POC being asked to share the values and mission of a predominately White NPO within communities that matched their racial identity. The whole team was considered successful if they collectively increased the NPOs social capital within a variety of communities of Color, although participants often avoided interacting directly with communities of Color due to their own difficulty communicating effectively.

The recruitment of POC to act as spokespeople for predominately White organizations in order to gain support from communities of Color is known as tokenism (Childress et al., 2024). Tokenism allows an organization or group to espouse dedication to diversity and even expand their outreach into new communities, but it also fails to truly include those communities and representative employees in meaningful decision-making processes (Slowka, 2024). This dynamic allows White women to feel as though they are collaborating with POC and improving community engagement, without resulting in structural change to the NPO itself, thereby protecting its existing culture (Childress et al., 2024; Slowka, 2024).

Policing – "I am Caring"

When participants asserted that they were "caring," it occurred in the context of attempting to protect coworkers of Color from other White women. This protection, whether solicited by a coworker or Color or self-initiated, consistently took the form of "calling out" the misbehavior of other White women and then excluding them from the organization. This pattern is more nuanced than the previous maneuvers in that it is sometimes directly requested by a coworker of Color. However, the method of protection can still be problematic when it shifts attention away from systemic issues and towards the individual actions of a single White woman with institutional power.

This maneuver can be referred to as policing, and it is characterized by a shifting of anger at perceived injustice towards other White individuals (Badenhorst, 2021). It is also more focused on punishing the wrong doer than facilitating learning, communication, or growth (Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Kanai, 2020). Furthermore, policing other White women in this manner enacts the purity pillar of White womanhood, which only serves to perpetuate White supremacist and patriarchal values (Kanai, 2020; Rehman & Hussain, 2016). The dysconscious turn in this maneuver is in the redirection of attention from a system of power that allowed POC to experience racial trauma in the first place towards a White woman who then functions as a scape goat, thereby giving the impression of progress without enacting structural change (Kanai, 2020).

Reflections on the Study

This study is a substantive grounded theory and has not undergone the necessary comparative analysis to move towards a formal theory yet (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). However, this theory does seek conceptual generalizability as defined by Glaser (2006) as conceptualizations that rise above descriptive conceptualizations bound within the specific context of a study to present a conceptual theory that can be exported to different context. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) terms this quality, generability, saying a theory "needs to be sufficiently general to increase its applicability . . . in multiconditional, ever-changing daily situations" (p. 314). This author suggests that the presented theory can be exported into a variety of predominately White female social settings including social groups, clubs, and employee resource groups. Furthermore, the conceptual units of perception of threat and maintenance of social hierarchies as a response are likely exportable to a variety of contexts wherein groups with proximity to different types of social power interact with those with

different social locations. The present study seeks to put forward a theory that can be challenged and built upon in future research as suggested above. The next section articulates the boundaries of the present study and suggest further ideas for future research.

Methodological Limitations

The primary methodological limitations in this study are related to its validity. Due to concerns about defensiveness, participants were only asked to member check the content of their interviews, not the core concepts or theory itself. This limited opportunities to co-construct meaning with the participants and eliminated the chance to verify that the theory itself resonated with participants. Furthermore, all coding and conceptualization was performed by the sole author of this paper. Isolating the analysis to one researcher increases the potential for biases to go unrecognized and unaddressed and can contribute to a less nuanced theory (Charmaz, 2014). Although I took efforts to engage in a hermeneutical process and reflect on my personal responses throughout the analysis, I am still limited by my own perspective and experiences.

Finally, my social location as a middle-class, White woman likely promoted candor and openness during data collection, but it is also difficult to analyze one's own culture (Demirci, 2024; DiAngelo, 2016). My own cultural assumptions may have blinded me to dynamics or themes within the data and without the additional perspective of another researcher performing analysis, those blind spots likely influence the theory.

Types of NPOs

At times, this study alludes to an overarching culture within NPOs. It is important to note that the participants in this study were all affiliated with NPOs that predominately employ White women. There are many NPOs run by and for a variety of marginalized groups,

particularly Black communities, which likely have significantly different organizational cultures and relationships to systemic power. Although the nonprofit sector is heavily influenced historically and today by White women, their influence is not ubiquitous (Penna, 2018). Grounded theory is strengthened by comparative analysis and comparison of this theory to dynamics within NPOs that do not consist primarily of White women could uncover important nuances in how White women relate oppression and wield power (Glaser & Strauss, 2006).

Facets of SubCulture

In the discussion section this study draws a connection between neoliberalism and the cult of White womanhood. There is an implication that neoliberalism influences the subculture of White womanhood as it appears within NPOs. Participants did not speak to political influences on their decisions to build careers in the nonprofit sector or how politics overlay personal values. American political discourse is extremely divisive and likely impacts White women's values and the ways they embody broader features of White womanhood. Future research could explore these influences and the interactions between social location, NPO involvement, and political beliefs. Such research would likely add important nuance to this study's definition of a culture of White womanhood in NPOs.

Proximity to Privilege

bell hooks (2014) speaks to the unique pressures felt by Black men in their capacity as agents in all but one rank, race. Most White women are in a similar position of close proximity to power in all but the rank of gender. This study touches on White women's motivation to maintain their proximity to power but does not explore the complex push and pull relationship White women seem to have with White men. Further investigation of this dynamic would

likely contribute important understanding to White women's perceptions of systemic threat and methods of seeking safety as they pertain to White men. A clearer understanding of this dynamic could further elucidate White women's motivations and methods for maintaining the social hierarchy at the expense of both themselves and POC.

Addressing Class

Much like previous research exploring social location, privilege, and power within the field of psychology, this study fails to address the role class plays in dynamics of race and gender. It is implied that most White women at NPOs are middle or upper-middle class and so one might assume that this study's participants are also middle or upper-middle class. That may be the case, but participants were not surveyed on and did not volunteer information on their current and past class identity so their class cannot be assumed within the analysis. Class is a tremendously important intersection with gender and race (Cho et al., 2013) and its continued invisibility within psychological research is concerning and problematic.

Implications for Clinical Psychology

Returning to my training in clinical psychology, I also suggest some implications of this study for clinical practice. Although this study's focus is heavily influenced by social psychology and sociological perspectives, individual clients exist within the context of social dynamics. As such, improving insight into the nature of that context can be a valuable tool in clinical work.

However, when dysconsciousness is present, promoting critical consciousness is not as simple as merely identifying the underlying systems of power and the ramifications thereof (King, 1991). Instead, clinicians must address the underlying sense of threat and clearly connect that threat to the same systems of power that dysconsciousness protects. Hunter (2021)

recommends the use of liberatory practices to help White women develop the social and psychological resources to counter the sense pervasive sense of fear and powerlessness they experience as a result of sexism. However, Hunter (2021) also suggests a decolonizing framework for deconstructing racial privilege. This framework presents a detailed understanding of systemic racism by White people as a liberatory "lack of innocence" that can prompt actions to dismantle oppressive systems by empowering those with privilege to clearly see the systems they participate in (p. 356).

Psychologists, particularly those engaged in clinical work, also share a remarkable set of similarities with White women in NPOs. Therapists are overwhelmingly White women and many even work within NPOs to provide clinical or administrative services. The theory presented here is therefore likely highly transferable. As the field of psychology continues to grapple with its own role in perpetuating oppression, we must evaluate our own systems of power and motivations for maintaining them. We are often trained to individualize both problems and solutions, which merely contributes to dysconsciousness similar to the maneuvers White women engage in when they feel threatened. Collectively we must shift our focus towards the systemic pressures that we see as threatening and evaluate or responses in terms of power rather in addition to individual actions.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout the research process I have reflected on my own identity as a White woman and how that shows up in this study. One theme that I have grappled with throughout, and that appears in my own findings, is the policing of White women's behaviors as they relate to dynamics of privilege and power by other White women. In many ways this research engages in that practice, particularly when discussing White women's stated values and the

forms of dysconsciousness they align with. My hope is that this research serves not to merely criticize my participants or other White women in similar positions, but to instead bring awareness to the social and psychological systems that perpetuate White supremacist and patriarchal power structures. In order to dismantle oppressive systems, we must first understand them and our roles within them. As a White woman myself I have felt the internal tension between my racial privilege and gender-based oppression that I describe in this study. I hope that in providing this analysis of that internal conflict, I and other White women can move towards both personal and systemic change.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Primary Questions

1. How did you get involved with your nonprofit?
   a. What does a typical day at work look like for you?
   b. What about working for a nonprofit organization do you enjoy, find challenging, or is otherwise important to you?
   c. Seek deeper descriptions of experiences and more information as needed.
2. How does your gender affect the work you do?
   a. What experiences have shaped your identity as a woman in the workplace?
   b. How would you describe yourself at work? Does that differ from how you would describe yourself outside of work? How so?
      i. Do you think those experiences would be similar for men? How so?
   c. Seek deeper descriptions of experiences and more information as needed.
3. Has race ever been relevant in your work? How so?
   a. Has your race ever come up in the workplace? How so?
   b. Seek deeper descriptions of experiences and more information as needed.
4. How do you think your experiences have differed from your male coworkers of Color?
   a. Do you think your experience would have been different for a White man or a Black woman in the same position? How so?
   b. Has there been a time when your identity as both White and a woman mattered in your work?
   c. Seek deeper descriptions of experiences and more information as needed.
5. Is there anything else that you think is important for me to know that we haven't talked about yet?
   a. Seek deeper descriptions of experiences and more information as needed.

Closing Questions

1. What are your thoughts on our conversation?
2. Do you have any lingering questions about what we discussed or this study?
3. Would you be interested in reviewing a summary of our conversation and providing feedback on how well that summary captures what we talked about?

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age? Multiple choice:
   a. Under 18 years
   b. 18-25 years
   c. 26-35 years
   d. 36-45 years
   e. 46-55 years
   f. 56-65 years
   g. 66+ years
2. What is your race? Short answer box
3. What is your gender? Short answer box
4. Have you been employed by a nonprofit organization for at least 12 months in the past 5 years?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. What sector have you spent the most time working in at nonprofit organizations (e.g. education, health, arts and culture, environment, etc.) Short answer box
6. What role(s) have you filled while working for a non-profit organization? Long answer box

Contact Information

1. Name *(short answer box)*
2. Email *(short answer box)*
3. Phone number *(short answer box)*
4. What is your preferred method of communication for scheduling?
   a. Phone
   b. Email