

(Un)familiar materials: Using dis/assemblage to think critically about race and racism

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Abstract: This study investigates how white educators engage with justice-centered pedagogies and practices in early childhood spaces. It is situated in the Southwestern United States where local/state/federal contexts are attempting to silence Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiatives and enact violence towards communities of Color. Rooted in Critical Whiteness Studies as a critique of white supremacy, this work interrogates past-present-future histories of white immunity and domination while forefronting the resistance of communities of Color across time, place, and space. The focus group session shared here is part of a larger study that uses photovoice and arts-informed analyses to move white early childhood educators across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy. Coming together as critical friends to unearth and confront enactments of race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces, co-researchers dis/assembled familiar-now-unfamiliar-to-be-familiar-again materials to make sense of previously-taken photographs. This individual and collective artmaking moved co-researchers with/in spaces of un/certainty – both with artmaking and speaking about race and racism. This study illustrates how artmaking set the stage for bravery, positioned co-researchers as critical friends, and provoked critical reflexivity. In doing so, it asserts dis/assemblage as a literal and metaphorical re-making process through which white educators build, break, and re-build art, themselves, and their early childhood spaces. This article calls for researchers to engage with methods and analyses processes outside of the whitestream and posits analytical artmaking as pivotal to whitewomen’s critical reflexivity.

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Introduction

Thinking about Race and Racism in Early Childhood Spaces

During a recent collaborative project, I made a zine which included work from artist Deborah Roberts. In an excerpt from Roberts’ (n.d.) artist statement, she described how artmaking is used to confront the dehumanization of Black communities. As a visual artist, Roberts’ use of collage illustrates the resistance of young Black children who are consistently Othered by whiteness↔antiBlackness. My process of assembling the zine page involved tracing the outline of a collage print-out with my finger, locking eyes with each child, and being provoked to engage with their joy, freedom, and movement. Unable to deny Black children’s livingness (McKittrick, 2021), I was forced to question my own complicity in whiteness↔antiBlackness (Acuff, 2020; Campt, 2021). When white people meaningfully center Black livingness and implicate (our)selves in race and racism, (we) can move across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy.

While I was dialoguing with the work and words of Roberts (n.d.) and other artists of Color, my local/state contexts in the Southwestern United States were attempting to silence Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) initiatives. And, in my larger context of the United States, Donald Trump had just been re-elected to the presidency. The violence towards communities of Color in my local, state, and federal contexts reinforced the need to reject whitestream methodologies. Through arts-inspired

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research, I have aimed to uncover how white early educators might navigate (our) whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces “to advocate for and with” (Love, 2019, p. 159) communities of Color. I have chosen to visually entangle whiteness and antiBlackness using ↔ so that all discussions of whiteness make visible how antiBlackness is always already present in the space (Morrison, 1992). Additionally, by illustrating the interlocking and interwoven relationship of whiteness and antiBlackness, I underscore how, in order to thrive, whiteness must maintain and grow antiBlack discourses.

Much scholarship exploring white educators’ experiences with justice-centered pedagogies and practices results in an arriving at *wokeness* in which white educators *realize* (our) whiteness↔antiBlackness and suddenly *wake* to (our) past racist ways, perpetuating discourses of white ignorance, domination, and immunity (Matias & Boucher, 2023). However, the work shared in this article aims to center justice-oriented pedagogies and practices being taken up by white teachers in a way that knows justice-centered work as ongoing and messy due to white people’s lasting complicity in whiteness↔antiBlackness. In early childhood spaces, which have inspired this work, we risk maintaining race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness when we refuse to root our pedagogies and practices in Black communities’ past-present-future ways of living, being, thinking, and doing (Boutte, 2022; Delpit, 2012; Wright & Counsell, 2018).

Through proBlack pedagogies and practices, early childhood educators (re)imagine desire-based (Tuck, 2009) early childhood spaces for Black children, families, and communities (Braden et al., 2022, Boutte et al., 2024, Johnson, 2022; Williams, 2022; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2022). However, without fully implicating (our)selves and young white children in whiteness↔antiBlackness, white educators in early childhood spaces only superficially problematize race and racism (i.e., Loukola, 2025; Marriott, 2003; Wild, 2023). Thus, to (re)imagine early childhood spaces as emancipatory and joyful for children, families, and communities of Color (Kohli, 2021; Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2023), we must dialogue antiracism *with* proBlack pedagogies and practices and use critical reflexivity to uncover (our) race and racism (Hood & Travis, 2023).

In the forthcoming, I critique white supremacy and interrogate past-present-future histories of whiteness↔antiBlackness by framing Critical Whiteness Studies as a Critique of White Supremacy (CWS) (Matias et al., 2014). To do so, I focus on theorizations of whiteness↔antiBlackness while also foregrounding people of Color’s moves to resist across time, place, and space. I move to disrupt CWS scholarship that is rooted in “Black suffering” (Brown, 2021, p.1) and damage-based research (Tuck, 2009) by forefronting how, since enslavement, Black scholars and intellectuals have been theorizing whiteness↔antiBlackness (hooks, 2015). This work contributes to whiteness scholarship interrogating how white educators make sense of race and racism (i.e., Lensmire, 2017; Link, 2022; Miller, 2015) and joins the work of critical artists-educators-scholars who use artmaking to uncover and contend with dominant discourses (i.e., Pindyck, 2018; Restler, 2023).

Naming and Confronting White Immunity and Domination

Whiteness↔antiBlackness aims to marginalize and Other communities of Color (Baldwin, 1985; Morrison, 1992). This interlocking codependency of whiteness↔antiBlackness has been illustrated by Rankine (2014) who fronted the work of Ligon (1992) and Hurston (2022) to explore the Othering of communities of Color through writing and art. Wynter (2021) asserted that whiteness↔antiBlackness was not just employed to Other communities of Color but to deny them personhood. In an extension of Wynter’s work, Christovale (2021) curated the 2021-2022 exhibition *No Humans Involved* through which artists of Color collectively called for (re)theorizing humanity and refusing dehumanizing single narratives of Blackness.

Because white supremacy desires to make humanity and whiteness synonymous (Cooper, 2016; Dyer, 1997; hooks, 2014), white people move within the safety of our *white privilege*, or what Ozias and Pasque (2022) call white immunity and domination. Therefore, we are afforded the choice to ignore how whiteness↔antiBlackness is employed to dehumanize people of Color (Mills, 2022). White scholar

McIntosh (2008) used an “invisible knapsack” to describe how white people came to know (our) white privilege (immunity and domination). She argued that whiteness↔antiBlackness has made itself invisible so that white people can deny its existence. Thus, white people are able to remain dysconscious to what systemic whiteness↔antiBlackness can afford (us). Black feminist scholar, Collins (2022) theorization of the “matrix of domination” or the matrices of oppression has made visible how disrupting systemic oppression requires that we actively confront interpersonal oppression by (re)centering Black women’s ways of living, being, and doing.

While white people have made attempts to trouble race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness, when in community with other white people, there is a heightened risk of “white talk” (McIntyre, 1997). This risk is evident in previous early childhood educational scholarship that shares narratives of white educators’ attempts to critique white supremacy alongside colleagues (Clarke & Watson, 2014; Yoon, 2012) and young children (Miller, 2015; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Although intending to disrupt race and racism, groups of white people may however end up holding space for white immunity and domination by refusing to name and confront (our or others’) employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness (McIntyre, 1997; Marx, 2006). Thus, white talk holds space for white denial, enabling white people to refuse (our) complicity in whiteness↔antiBlackness (McIntyre, 1997). By engaging in white talk, white people superficially appear to be working to unsettle race and racism without being forced to relinquish the affordances of (our) whiteness↔antiBlackness (Bailey, 2014).

In hopes of holding a brave-not-safe space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for white educators interested in naming and confronting race and racism in their pedagogies and practices, the work presented in this article relies on the building of critical friend communities. These critical friend communities are rooted in mutual trust and respect. In successful critical friend communities, critical friends have space to think about un/certainties, (re)theorize data from different vantage points, and critique how power and knowledge might be (de)centered in research (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Critical friendships are strengthened by “shared commitments” (Jara & Russell, 2022, p. 86) and, when rooted in equity and justice, can support more ethical decision-making practices (Brandenburg & McDonough, 2019). Therefore, in justice-centered research around race and racism, critical friends have the potential to hold one another accountable for their enactments of whiteness↔antiBlackness. While I use the word *friend* to describe co-researchers, I also recognize how researcher-participant power dynamics are always already moving across-between-within-beyond our relationships.

Artmaking as a Way of Criticality

While educational researchers (i.e., Emerson, 2023b; Luttrell & Clark, 2018; Pindyck, 2018; Restler, 2023; Templeton, 2018) have used artmaking (i.e., painting, paper-looping, tracings, rubbings, video-making) to thicken their analytical processes, there is a dearth of educational scholarship that engages co-researchers in analytical artmaking. Working collectively with visual methodologies supports us in naming and bringing forward the dysconscious (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Guillemain & Drew, 2010), our white ways of living and being deep within us that have remained safely unproblematized and unsaid (King, 1991). Analytical artmaking holds space for co-researchers to unearth complex discourses of knowledge and power (Rolling, 2013). Thus, artmaking spaces, which by nature make visible overlaps and contradictions, have the potential to become ones of individual and community transformation (Whitelaw, 2021). Kraehe and Brown (2011) call critical artmaking a “re-making process” (p. 505), referring to both the physical act of artmaking and the personal transformation experienced by the maker. Artists-scholar-educators Hamlin and Restler (2021) believe that multisensorially “nam[ing]” (p. 44) whiteness↔antiBlackness is a critical move toward destabilizing oppressive pedagogies and practices in educational spaces. Through artmaking, this multisensorial disruption of race and racism holds space for educators to (re)theorize past-present-future histories of whiteness↔antiBlackness and (re)imagine Black futurities (Keifer-Boyd, 2011).

As part of a larger project that uses photovoice, a participatory arts-informed methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang et al., 1996), the work shared here uses analytical artmaking

with white educators to begin (or continue) to (dis)lodge race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness from early childhood spaces. While the larger project is rooted in co-researchers' sensemaking of race and racism, and how they both reify and disrupt whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces, this article is guided by the question: *How might a participatory arts-informed focus group session support white educators in holding space for moving across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy to disrupt race and racism in early childhood pedagogies, practices, and discourses?*

Method: Confronting Race and Racism through Artmaking

In the forthcoming, I illustrate how photovoice and analytical artmaking have supported white educators in the southwestern United States to (dis)entangle - to name, confront, [reify], disrupt - race and racism from early childhood spaces. It centers a focus group session, which supported a convening of critical friends, to make visible how white early childhood educators take up individual and collective analytical artmaking to move across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy in early childhood spaces.

Coming Together as Critical Friends

As part of my dissertation study, I designed two focus group sessions in which co-researchers could come together as critical friends. Co-researchers were recruited via social media posts and word-of-mouth but recruitment during local and state attacks on DEIB proved challenging. One co-researcher discontinued participation in the study early on and another co-researcher who agreed to the study expressed deep concern about confidentiality. After weeks of recruitment, our critical friend community was made up of three cisgender whitewomen from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds: me (Molly), Elizabeth, and Laura. Our experiences in the field of early childhood education are vast, but at the time of the gathering, we identified as a graduate student (Molly), a kindergarten/first grade teacher at a private independent school (Laura), and a PreK teacher in a public school's special education ESL classroom (Elizabeth). Our prior understandings of justice-centered pedagogies and practices ranged. While Laura and I were critically reflecting on our continued complicity in white↔antiBlack discourses, Elizabeth conceptualized antiracist educators and early childhood spaces as "not racist." When asked about their intentions for the study, both Elizabeth and Laura shared that they were looking forward to having conversations around race and racism and learning how to better center and celebrate the expertise of children, families, and communities of Color.

We came together on a Sunday afternoon in my home, amidst the clutter of children's artwork and family photographs, to extend our racial literacy - how we read, write, talk, move, think, and do race and racism. Over three hours together, we moved from strangers, acquaintances, and instructor-student relationships to one of critical friends who gently/forcefully pushed each other to confront white↔antiBlack ways of living, being, doing, thinking, moving, teaching, and learning. While we weren't *friends* in a social or intimate sense, we came to mutually respect one another and, due to our shared desire to name and trouble white supremacy in early childhood spaces, we built relationships that invited criticality. The study's artmaking provocations supported us in maintaining our commitment to critiquing white supremacy. However, at times we began to move away from a focus on race and racism. In those moments, I referenced questions that educational scholar Abby Emerson (2023b) had designed as a way for white researchers to explicitly problematize instances of white co-researcher race-evasiveness.

Our First Engagement with Analytical Artmaking

Photovoice scholars have relied on image analytical tools to increase co-researcher reflexivity, hold space for co-constructed knowledge production, and deepen co-researcher engagement with image analysis during interviews and focus group sessions (Liebenberg, 2022). These analytical tools, such as VOICE (Wang & Burris, 1997), SHOWeD (Wang, 1999), PHOTO (Hussey, 2006), and DEPICT (Switzer & Flicker, 2021), engage co-researchers in responding orally and through writing to reflexive questions about their images. However, because photovoice analysis has been critiqued for its (in)attention to the images themselves (Vellanki & Davesar, 2020), I designed this study to provide us with multiple individual and

collective analytical engagements with the photographs. These layered creative opportunities to engage in image analysis further extended our critical reflexivity (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Jarldorn & Deer, 2020; Luttrell & Clark, 2018) which is a vital part of uncovering dysconscious racism (King, 1991). Analytical artmaking through dis/assemblage was intentionally chosen for the study so that co-researchers might engage in both literal and metaphorical un-making and “re-making” (Kraehe & Brown, 2011, p. 505) of practice, self, and the field of early childhood education and care.

Prior to our small group session, we responded through photography to the question: *How might you make visible Black livingness* (McKittrick, 2021) - *creativity, joy, celebration, brilliance, play - in your early childhood space?* Co-researchers were asked to respond to the provocation through photography using the camera of their choosing. Due to ethical considerations, co-researchers were asked to not include any people or places as that would affect the confidentiality of the study. When we came together for the first time as a critical friend community, we used dis/assemblage to analyze our photos. During the focus group session, co-researchers were provided with an artmaking-as-analysis protocol and artmaking supplies. The protocol contained four propositions:

1. Title or caption the photo.
2. How are race and racism visible in the photo?
3. How is whiteness visible in the photo?
4. How does this photo make you think about yourself as an early childhood educator?

To respond to the propositions, co-researchers were invited to use any of the materials provided – various magazines, printed co-researcher-taken photos, printouts of initial data codes, stickers, colored paper, doilies, scissors, glue sticks, and multipurpose art paper. I intentionally selected materials that co-researchers might have prior experiences with. While the materials were familiar to us, as we encountered them in analytical artmaking, they became (un)familiar. Using these once-familiar-now-unfamiliar-to-be-familiar-again materials (Pindyck, 2018), we reflected on the re/de/centering of race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in our photographs and pushed ourselves to think critically about justice-centered pedagogies and practices in early childhood spaces.

We then drafted artist statements, drawing from Hussey’s (2006) PHOTO protocol to identify what we had learned about [disrupting] race and racism in early childhood spaces. Finally, we shared our collages aloud and invited feedback from fellow co-researchers using an adaptation of Dawson and Lee’s (2018) image work strategy, Describe - Analyze - Relate (D-A-R). Our dialogue followed a DAR-R in which we described what we noticed about one another’s artmaking, thought critically about its connections to race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness, and related the artmaking back to our own personal experiences. Then, to maintain our goals of collective growth and disruption (B. Link, personal communication, September 4, 2024), each of us reflected and responded to our work, its potentialities, and the comments made by our critical friends.

After engaging with/in dis/assemblage, we used *mapping-as-analysis* to visually map our images and collages alongside images of work by antiracist and abolitionist artists (Drama for Schools, 2024). After arranging and rearranging the images into thematic piles, we then made sense of the piles using questions from Pass the Picture (Austin Independent School District, n.d.) and Visual Mapping (Drama for Schools, 2024). These questions supported us in dialoguing across-between-within-beyond our photovoice images, the dis/assemblages, and antiracist and abolitionist artwork by artists of Color.

Layered Analytical Artmaking and Analyses Processes

I have aimed for crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) through thick collection and analysis of the visual and written texts produced during this study. To do so, Elizabeth, Laura, and I have individually and collectively encountered and related our co-produced knowledges across-between-within-beyond multiple sites (reflexive journal entries, focus groups, photography, artmaking, and artist statements). As a researcher/co-researcher on the project, I also individually analyzed our co-generated knowledge using *rubbing-as-analysis* and qualitative coding processes. To analyze the dis/assemblages through *rubbing-as-*

analysis, I placed a piece of glassine paper over each of the collages and rubbed the paper using the side of an unwrapped black crayon. While rubbing, I narrated aloud encountered overlaps, textures, gaps - wonderings (Restler, 2023). I then transcribed these narrations, so that I could theorize with them through reflexive journaling. Written texts (focus group transcription and artist statements) were transcribed and coded first using open coding processes and then using codes informed by my understandings of past-present-future histories of whiteness↔antiBlackness and justice-centered pedagogies and practices in early childhood spaces. These codes were then grouped and re-grouped so they could later be brought into dialogue with the theorizing that had emerged during the *rubbing-as-analysis*.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I engaged in reflexive journaling. Before and after all encounters with co-researchers and data, I systemically documented preliminary connections to race, racism, whiteness↔antiBlackness, and justice-centered pedagogies and practices. In these reflexive journals, I also reflected on my own employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness and how they might be informing the study. In addition to reflexive journaling, I met three times throughout the larger study with an outside consultant, an equity researcher with extensive experience working with/in justice-centered early childhood spaces. These meetings held space for me to receive critical feedback on how my own complicity in whiteness↔antiBlackness might be affecting my interpretation of the study's data. In this work, I have aimed to excavate my own white↔antiBlack ways of living and being, in addition to sharing the lived experiences and embodied knowledges of co-researchers.

Results: (Re)Learning Materials within the Context of Race and Racism

The co-constructed knowledge shared in the forthcoming is part of a larger study, which seeks to understand the ways that white teachers make sense of race and racism with young children and how they (re)imagine justice-centered early childhood spaces. Thus, what is presented here is (in)complete and (un)final and while the following stories refer to our collective understandings from one arts-inspired focus group session; they are entangled with all of our past-present-future engagements. Using arts-informed analysis supported us to move across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy to disrupt race and racism in early childhood pedagogies, practices, and discourses. As we created individually and together, we moved within a space of un/certainty, confronting our dis/comfort - both in artmaking and speaking about race and racism. Interwoven into each of our experiences were themes of how artmaking set the stage for bravery, positioned co-researchers as critical friends, and provoked critical reflexivity. Our stories are not coming-to-wokeness stories as each of us continues to negotiate race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in our early childhood contexts.

A Note to Readers: In the sections that follow, I share narratives from our time together. I have labeled these using our names (Elizabeth, Laura, and Molly) so that readers first gain insight into our individual engagements with the themes before bringing them into analytical dialogue with a critique of white supremacy in early childhood spaces. The co-produced knowledges and understandings shared are a glimpse into our collective and individual sense-making of these visual texts. Some elements of the visual texts uphold damaged-based narratives of BIPOC communities that may not be discussed fully here. As the reader, seeing these visual texts may be potentially (re)traumatizing. I have chosen to share them in their entirety to draw connections between artmaking and the expansion of whitewomen's racial literacy.

Figure 1

Elizabeth's Collage - We are All Connected

Figure 2

Laura's Collage - Reading, Nature, and Representation

Figure 3

My (Molly's) Collage - Untitled.



How “[We are] Not Artists” Set the Stage for Us to Begin to Be Brave

The act of collage-making pushed us into a space of dis/comfort and un/certainty. None of us have formal art backgrounds which meant that while the materials we were using were familiar to us - our photovoice photographs, magazines, paper, doilies, stickers, scissors, glue - they were similarly unfamiliar and had to be learned again within this new context of analytical artmaking. This un-re-learning required us to take risks as we (re)familiarized ourselves with the materials and collage-making to theorize around race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness. Experiencing a collective dis/comfort with artmaking set the stage for us to be more ready to move with dis/comfort in our conversations around race and racism.

About Laura’s Artmaking Experiences: When I first introduced the artmaking-as-analysis protocol, Laura sarcastically said that she “love[d] a good protocol” when being asked to make art. Throughout the collage-making, Laura grappled with her identity as an artist, preemptively asking us to temper any expectations we might have and comparing her art to that of a child in her K/1 class. Laura’s nervousness around artmaking, resulted in her emphatically claiming “I’m not an artist” and jokingly-not-jokingly asking what she had signed herself up for. As Laura worked, she vocalized her need to identify a vision, to define her collage and give it purpose. At times, Laura (re)oriented herself to the work by picking up her photograph and (re)visiting the original photovoice provocation. Despite these strategies, Laura’s insecurities around art were noticeable and she often relied on self-talk to push through her discomfort.

About Elizabeth’s Artmaking Experiences: Although less vocal than Laura about her “not an artist” identity, Elizabeth too positioned herself as a novice artmaker. She expressed relief that she was being asked to collage as opposed to something she believed required more artistic ability, like drawing. Even then, Elizabeth asked multiple clarifying questions before beginning to collage and relied heavily on her photo and the artmaking protocol. Elizabeth negotiated her “not an artist” discomfort by seeking comfort in the artmaking materials. Unlike Laura and I, Elizabeth chose to use just one magazine to visually respond to the artmaking protocol and, when she noticed that she was *ahead* of Laura and I in her artmaking, she justified her progress by saying that the magazine, a vision board book with a target audience of children/teenagers, was just “really good” and had so many “inspirational words and phrases.”

About My (Molly’s) Artmaking Experiences: Although I had already moved within a space of incertitude while tracing our photographs using Sharpie markers and tracing paper, this focus group was my first time creating alongside co-researchers. As we worked, I nervously responded to their un/certainties, explaining that I also wasn’t an artist, but I did/do believe that we are all creative people. My own “not an artist” insecurities (re)positioned me within the space, distancing me from researcher-as-authority-figure-and-all-knowing. Like Laura, my work also lacked a concrete vision, and I focused on intentionality over speed and completion. I was scared to commit to a vision or plan, choosing to use a glue stick to tack cut-outs onto my canvas as opposed to Modge Podge or more permanent adhesive methods. While at times I thought I would return to pieces of my collage to better adhere them to the canvas, I never did.

Labeling ourselves as “not artists” enabled us to conceptualize artmaking as product-over-process. Although we engaged with product-over-process to varying degrees, each of us dis/assembled towards a final product, a collage that, despite the tangles along the way (Emerson, 2023a), would illustrate our

understandings of Black livingness in early childhood spaces. This was evident in Elizabeth's reliance on one vision board book for support, how Laura sought guidance from her photo and the photovoice provocation, and my failed attempt to re-negotiate the placement of certain collage pieces. Although at times we moved across-between-within-beyond our collages as always (im)perfect and (un)finished (Anzaldúa, 2015; Whitelaw, 2021), we also maintained our white ways of doing and held onto our collective understanding that once finished, these collages would help us move towards resolution.

Navigating Artmaking Protocols as "Not Artists"

While the focus group protocol I had designed allowed us to maintain the linearity of artmaking and research, it also provided much-needed structural pushback. In our artmaking-as-analysis, we each resisted the urge to change protocols and remain in the comfort of our whiteness↔antiBlackness. This was most evident while (un)following a DAR-R process to make sense of our collages in relation to race, racism, whiteness↔antiBlackness. The narratives that follow illustrate how being held to the rigidity of DAR-R supported us in (un)covering how race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness move across-between-within-beyond our early childhood spaces. Even when we were tempted to mask our own employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness, the DAR-R protocol was there to remind us that every part of this focus group session was meant to bring dis/comfort [and growth].

About Laura's Artmaking-as-Analysis: In our first round of DAR-R, after I had shared my analytical collage, Laura responded that she was sure she could find a connection to herself if she "had to." While Laura engaged in critical reflexivity throughout the focus group session, the DAR-R protocol pushed her to negotiate her dis/comfort in critically reflecting upon her engagements with race and racism in early childhood spaces. As Elizabeth began to reflect on the whitestreaming of early childhood spaces, Laura was provoked to think about how most early childhood classrooms "look as though they were designed by white people," acknowledging the disconnect between early childhood spaces and communities of Color without turning inward to reflect on her own classroom space and its centering of whiteness↔antiBlackness.

About Elizabeth's Artmaking-as-Analysis: Elizabeth also found herself in a space of dis/comfort when using the DAR-R process. As Laura and I described, analyzed, and related to Elizabeth's collage, Elizabeth fought the urge to respond, even asking at times, "Can I respond yet?" Listening to others respond to her analytical collage was uncomfortable for Elizabeth and she continued to interrupt, asking if it was time for her to explain her work. When it was time for Elizabeth to respond, she referred back to each of our descriptions, analyses, and relations before noting things that we hadn't mentioned. Elizabeth was particularly focused on the relationship between the Ferris wheel (at the center of her collage) and a prickly cactus to describe how "like someone of Color may... feel the prickliness of... life a little bit more, or like the tumultu, like the struggles a little bit more, um, so yes, that we are all we're all connected. We're all like, on the same ride. We're all doing the same thing, but we're all going to experience this a little bit differently." While Elizabeth's response attempted to make sense of white immunity and domination, it also focused on Black suffering.

About My (Molly's) Artmaking-as-Analysis: Like Elizabeth, I also struggled to follow the DAR-R protocol. While I resisted to interject myself into the initial DAR-R protocol steps, after responding to Laura and Elizabeth's comments, I immediately initiated conversation with them regarding my collage and my thought processes. When Elizabeth asked if the bottom right-hand corner of my collage was supposed to be a stage, I used humor to deflect the unease I was feeling, responding, "No... but, you know, that's interesting. That would be really good, yeah... Actually, yes, it is a stage. It's ever evolving. [Laughter]. I was gonna put a title here, this to me, was, like, the multiple layers, like, how we're seeing everything through multiple layers. And I was thinking about putting a title here, and then I realized I can't title it because, like, it's Untitled. It's unfinished..."

Holding to the DAR-R protocol, although complicated and problematic at times, helped expose our dis/comfort in confronting our own whiteness↔antiBlackness. Listening to critical friends describe, analyze, and relate to our visual texts without being able to respond forced us to take in what was being

said. When we were finally able to respond, we responded by both maintaining and disrupting white↔antiBlack discourses, particularly those of white immunity and domination. This was evidenced in Laura's resistance to critically reflect on how she might enact and be in relationship with whiteness↔antiBlackness, Elizabeth's focus on the suffering of people of Color, and my use of humor to deny my own insecurities. In navigating artmaking-as-analysis, we both disrupted white supremacy discourses and leaned into our own white immunity and domination - avoidance, deficit, humor. This negotiation of white immunity and domination through white talk aligns with tensions other white scholars (e.g., Marx, 2006; McIntyre, 1997) have encountered while working with white participants to confront race and racism.

Coming to Be [Critical] Friends

When I used qualitative coding processes to make sense of our focus group session, I initially recognized the chatter between Elizabeth, Laura and I as "small talk." However, upon further reflection, I realized that this was us coming to know one another in a much more intimate relationship than "small talk" insinuated. As we created together, we shared experiences of mothering, travel, teaching and learning with young children, our previous experiences in early childhood spaces, and our educational backgrounds. Thus, collective artmaking supported us in forming a critical friendship with one another. As we (re)learned the collage materials in dialogue with photovoice, we came to be [critical] friends, familiarizing ourselves with each other's personal and professional contexts.

How I (Molly) Came to Be a [Critical] Friend: It was important for Elizabeth to make conversation and to create relationships across-between-within-beyond the focus group setting. Elizabeth often initiated discussion both about our personal and professional lives and found similarities between her and the members of our group. Elizabeth asked about my experiences in the doctoral program which provoked Laura to ask questions about my research interests and previous early childhood teaching experiences. As we moved within the inbetween space, Elizabeth, Laura, and I negotiated previous power relationships (business-owner-customer and instructor-student) to move towards [critical] friendship.

How Elizabeth Came to Be a [Critical] Friend: Based on our discussion of the Trump administration's attacks on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in higher education, Elizabeth reflected on the justice-centered classes she had taken in her teacher education program. Elizabeth shared that one of the course readings had been the text, *The Death of My Mexican Name* about a child whose teacher declared that her name was "too long." Elizabeth said, "I think about that every single time I'm, like, filling out my rosters, and I have, like, someone with like, four last names, I'm like, like, we're going to use all their names we're not just going to pick one because a lot of times that's what happens, you know, and that's your identity."

How Laura Came to Be a [Critical] Friend: Elizabeth's reflection led Laura to share her own grapplings around naming with a child in her classroom. With Elizabeth and I, Laura narrated aloud her challenges in navigating a parent's preferred name for Kamilla, a child in Laura's class. "[Her mother]... said, we call her Kami, and the schools call her Kami... But I have a Cam in my class... She's only with me for two hours a day, and every time I say Cam's name, she thinks it's about her, and she gets really confused, and sometimes she gets stressed out, because Cam tends to have behaviors.... I asked [Kami], I was like, [do] you want me to call you Kami or can I call you Kamilla? She said, You can call me Kamilla. Okay, I'm gonna call you Kamilla, and then I told her mom that and she was fine with it."

Prior to becoming co-researchers, I had relationships with both Elizabeth and Laura. While Elizabeth knew me as an early childhood educator, the instructor of a course she had taken as a preservice teacher, Laura knew me personally as a parent and small business owner. Elizabeth and Laura had never met before coming together in this study. Critical friendship communities are built on shared general interests (Jara & Russell, 2022), and we came together in this first focus group session because of our dedication to justice-centered early childhood spaces. However, Elizabeth showed us that, in order to really move our group towards criticality, we'd need to create deeper relationships with one another. While Laura and I focused quietly on our artmaking, Elizabeth pushed us to get to know each other personally and professionally. In

doing so, she facilitated conversations by identifying commonalities we shared, helping us build strong connections rooted in mutual interests and common lived experiences.

Confronting Whiteness↔AntiBlackness with [Critical] Friends

With Elizabeth's support, we built our critical friendship from experiences with/in justice-centered teacher education programs, local/state/federal political contexts, and early childhood spaces. As a result, our critical friendship could become a support for us to move across-between-within-beyond our vulnerability. During the artmaking focus group session highlighted in this article, we began to push one another and ourselves to critically reflect on our engagements with race and racism and reifications of whiteness↔antiBlackness. Through gentle-yet-firm pushback, we were encouraged to confront our own [uncomfortable] ways of thinking whitely.

Gentle-Yet-Firm Pushback, Elizabeth and Laura: As we worked, Elizabeth shared that her class was "from around the world." She mentioned this various times using different language - calling them "worldly" or saying that there was only one "American" who "[wasn't] actually American but Russian." When Elizabeth said that "no one is from here," Laura paused, "Wait, nobody in your class was born here?" Elizabeth clarified that yes, they had been born here but their parents had not, making them "first-generation." The conversation flowed into a discussion of how different their early childhood contexts were, as Laura shared that in her class of nine children there were two children of Color (also the only two children of Color in the entire k-12 school).

While Elizabeth was comfortable using divisive language to describe her classroom, Laura sought to disrupt language that in/accurately described the lived experiences of the children and families in Elizabeth's space. Elizabeth's conceptualization of *American* as white upheld white normativity, positioning anyone who is not embodying white ways of living and doing in the margins (Baldwin, 1985; Morrison, 1992), denying them place and space in the United States. This conceptualization of *Americanness* has been further extremized in the context of this work, where conservative public officials have argued that immigration puts [white] American citizens in danger (Gopal, 2022; Packer et al., 2016). In/directly, Laura challenged Elizabeth's beliefs by asking a clarifying question. After this interaction, Elizabeth continued to use the term "worldly" and emphasize that the children in her class come from all over the world, but she no longer referred to them as not being "from here." Our community of critical friendship held space for Laura to disrupt Elizabeth's views of what it means to be *American* and for Elizabeth to begin to challenge and transform her own thinkings about *American* and white as being synonymous.

Firm-Yet-Gentle Pushback, Laura and I (Molly): Laura and I also pushed one another to critically reflect on our engagements with race and racism within our early childhood contexts. When asked what she had noticed about herself during this focus group session, Laura said, "Um, I definitely like have a focus on Blackness when I'm when it comes to like, talking about centering diversity... And I'm realizing that I don't do a good enough job of thinking about, like, the whole array of diversity. I don't think I have focused enough on that in my classroom. And I don't think I focused enough on that in this whole discussion..." I responded, "I do think that there is, like, I focus on antiBlackness because I think that whiteness... exists in tandem with antiBlackness... So I do think that... there is argument for saying that until Black people [are emancipated] nobody is [emancipated]. But then also right, like, how do we bring... into dialogue... Indigenous communities, Latine... communities, ... people of Color, right?"

While I understood Laura's desire to bring into dialogue BIPOC experiences of oppression and resistance to her early childhood space, I did feel like this was a moment for an explicit (re)focusing on whiteness↔antiBlackness. I wanted our critical friend community to maintain its focus on naming and confronting whiteness↔antiBlackness and doing so means explicitly (although not exclusively) uplifting Black ways of living and being. Thinking with Black feminist scholar Lorde (2007), I pushed back on Laura's wonderings about our focus on Blackness, saying, "Until Black people [are emancipated] nobody is [emancipated]." To meaningfully confront the entanglement of whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces, I encouraged Laura and Elizabeth to move beyond thinking about white privilege to thinking about "white immunity" and "white domination" (Ozias & Pasque, 2022, p. 26). Interrogating my

own white immunity and domination across past-present-future histories of race and racism supported me to better understand how my enactments of privilege have directly maintained the oppression of Black communities. Therefore, I have encouraged our critical friend community to center proBlackness so that we might begin to recognize “whiteness-at-work” (Yoon, 2012, p. 589) in our educational spaces. In other words, proBlack pedagogies and practices support us in calling out white normativity in early childhood spaces while also interrogating our own enactments of white immunity and domination (Braden et al., 2022).

Armaking to Move-Not-Stand with Communities of Color

After we created our collages, co-researchers engaged in a short period of reflexive writing, drafting artist statements a la Hussey’s (2006) PHOTO protocol. Using the PHOTO acronym, we described the collage and the movement within it, why we’d chosen to make it the way we did, what the collage might tell us about race and racism, and how the collage might provoke us to disrupt race and racism within our personal and professional contexts. Although co-researchers were encouraged to write as much or as little as we would like, each of us engaged in thirty minutes of quiet writing during the focus group session. These artist statements held space of us to reflect on how our collages had extended our thinkings around our initial photographs.

About Laura’s Artist Statement: In her collage artist statement, Laura very intentionally wrote about each piece of her collage, moving methodically from front-to-back, from the pictures of the children’s faces to tear-outs to doilies to whiteness to nature. Writing about whiteness as her background, Laura wrote, “I chose to represent whiteness in a very background and minimal way, hiding behind the trees. It is there and it’s important to talk about and see. I specifically tried to de-center it because that is a reflection of how I do it in the classroom. We talk about how we may see things through a lens of whiteness, so it’s always there and a part of our discussion, but I want to center and lift non-white voices to open up the student’s perspectives.”

Laura used the artmaking and writing to reflect on whiteness as a discourse, drawing initial parallels between how she thinks about whiteness with the children in her class and initial goals for disrupting whiteness in her early childhood space. Laura theorized whiteness as always already present in her educational space. By hiding it behind the trees, Laura understood whiteness as invisible, constantly making moves in the background. Laura recognized that white supremacy needed to be made visible so that it could be challenged (Roediger, 2022). Therefore, Laura’s writing emphasized the importance of calling out whiteness↔antiBlackness, naming it and then disrupting it through the (re)centering of BIPOC knowledges and experiences. Laura’s choosing of texts that confront whiteness↔antiBlackness and highlight Black activism, joy, and brilliance illustrates how Laura hoped to (re)imagine an antiracist early childhood space (Escayg, 2020). Although Laura’s use of the phrase “non-white” linguistically re-centered white normativity, she was intentionally working in her classroom to move BIPOC ways of being from margin to center.

About Elizabeth’s Artist Statement: In Elizabeth’s collage artist statement, she began to critically reflect on her positionality as a whitewoman, thinking deeply about how she experiences the world and how the world experiences her. In her collage, Elizabeth centered a rainbow Ferris Wheel cut-out at the middle of her canvas, drawing a parallel between the Ferris Wheel and the “ride of life.” Elizabeth wrote that everyone is in their own individual cart and, superficially, it looks as though everyone is along for the same “fair fun ride.” However, according to Elizabeth, while we may go through experiences together, we experience them differently based on our positionalities.

Elizabeth applied her preliminary understandings of positionality to early childhood spaces, reflecting on how, because white immunity and domination are always already present in educational spaces, communities of Color experience [white] educational spaces differently than white communities. Elizabeth used her artist statement to draw parallels between white immunity and domination and schooling. However, she did not yet intersect the two to recognize how white immunity and domination in early childhood spaces happens at the expense of children, families, and communities of Color.

Therefore, Elizabeth's reflection upheld discourses of privilege (McIntosh, 2008) as opposed to immunity and domination (Ozias & Pasque, 2022). Elizabeth navigated her new critically reflexive practice using generalizations and, as she wrote, she began to think about how whiteness↔antiBlackness have been and continue to be moving across-between-within-beyond early childhood spaces.

About My (Molly's) Artist Statement: Somewhere across-between-within-beyond the analytical tracing of our photos, I came to realize that our ideas around centering and making visible Black livingness were rooted in teaching provocations designed for young children – dolls, books, puzzles - concrete and touchable. In my artist statement, I began to think about how artmaking had pushed me to disentangle my teaching pedagogies from my practices, to think about *how* I teach might be rooted in Black livingness as opposed to *what* I teach. In my artist statement, I noted that attempting to disentangle pedagogies from practices at the intersection of whiteness↔antiBlackness and proBlackness felt “difficult” but also wondered if this was my own resistance to working within a space of uncertainty and discomfort. I reflected, “It is my hope that this collage makes us think differently, pushing us to think about [our teaching pedagogies] and how they [might] emphasize community, family, nature, resistance, connection, and generational knowledges.”

Early on in the conceptualization of this project, I theorized pedagogies and practices as in relationship with one another, interwoven and interlocking, impossible to disentangle. However, in my collage artist statement, I began to question if I was in fact working towards confronting whiteness↔antiBlackness in both my pedagogies and practices (Boutte et al., 2011) or if my justice-centered work was being relegated solely to provocations for learning and teaching (Kuh et al., 2016). My analytical artmaking and the artist statement that followed were a “flashpoint,” what Hood and Travis (2023) have defined as a “visceral embodied moment” (p. 29). I was physically and emotionally confronted by the question: Was I living my values through my teaching pedagogies? Was I moving-not-standing (A. Jones, personal communication, April 30, 2024) with communities of Color? This unexpected and immediate need for critical reflexivity was overwhelming and challenged me to uncover how my teaching mis/aligned with the values and beliefs that I had wanted my early childhood spaces to be rooted in.

Leaning into the Critical with Critical Friends

Across each collage artist statement, Laura, Elizabeth, and I began (or continued) to encounter white immunity and domination, the presence of white normativity in early childhood spaces, and how our teaching might mis/align with our justice-centered goals. While the artist statements held space for some initial critical reflection, our co-production of knowledge, rooted in dialogue around our photographs and collages, extended our understandings of disrupting race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces. While white affinity groups risk reifying whiteness↔antiBlackness through white talk, our critical friend community also had the potential to challenge race and racism in new-to-us ways.

Elizabeth's Reflective Process: In the DAR-R process, Elizabeth came to notice that her collage focused heavily on her classroom as a space of joy and celebration. Through our discussion, she realized that while making visible Black ways of living, she was allowing her school's un/spoken policies to protect her white immunity and domination. In other words, Elizabeth came to know that by only holding space for joy, creativity, and celebration, she neglected to share with the children in her class Black protest and resistance. When asked, Elizabeth agreed that these would be hard conversations for her to have with the young children in her class. In realizing that she had been sitting within the comfort of her whiteness↔antiBlackness, Elizabeth verbally dedicated herself to being brave in her classroom space. And, on her way home that day, she asked Laura for her classroom book list so that she might use some (or many) of them with the children in her class.

Prior to this first meeting of our critical friend community, Elizabeth's engagement with justice-centered pedagogies and practices remained joy-centered. However, our critical dialogue pushed Elizabeth to reflect on how she had been hiding behind this centering of joy, avoiding what might be “hard conversations” for her to have. After speaking with Laura and I, Elizabeth realized that she would like to learn how to bring past-present-future histories of confronting race and racism into her classroom. In doing

so, she hoped to share with young children stories of BIPOC resistance. As counterstories, these texts might support Elizabeth and the young children in her class to both problematize past-present-future histories of race and racism and recognize their own movements of whiteness↔antiBlackness (Gardner, 2017). Our critical friendship introduced Elizabeth to a new way of thinking about confronting race and racism with young children and empowered her with resources to be brave during “hard conversations.”

Laura’s Reflective Process: After sorting and re-sorting our photographs and collages alongside images of work by activist-artists, I asked each of us to reflect on what we had observed about ourselves and our practices as early childhood educators. Laura, who earlier had struggled to critically look inward at her own classroom practices or possible complicity in race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness, shared that the entire focus group had been a “humbling” experience for her. Laura further shared that she had realized she maybe didn’t know as much as she thought she had in regard to race and racism and each artmaking aspect of the project - the photo-taking, the collage-making, and the visual mapping - had further shown her how much she didn’t “know.”

While Laura was vocal about naming and analyzing race and racism in early childhood spaces, she was also hesitant to implicate herself in white↔antiBlack discourses. However, throughout the different focus group steps, Laura had been quietly engaging in critical reflexivity and, at the end of our time together, she vocalized her realization that meaningful engagement with justice-centered work is complex and non-linear. When Laura shared that our work together so far had been “humbling,” she began to engage in “critical humility” which is a foundational piece of Sealey-Ruiz’s (2020) racial literacy development model. Sealey-Ruiz (2020) defined “critical humility” as “remain[ing] open to understanding the limits of our own worldviews and ideologies” (n.p.). By moving within a space of critical humility and discomfort, Laura was able to re-dedicate herself to continuous learning so that she might better disrupt race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in early childhood spaces (Saad, 2020; Tager, 2022).

My (Molly’s) Reflective Process: As I worked on my collage, I noticed how much my previous photograph tracings had impacted my understandings of how I (de)center Black livingness with young children. My photograph, which showed multiple narratives of Black joy and creativity still forefronted concrete visual examples of Black livingness rather than rooting my ways of living, being, doing, thinking, and playing with young children outside of the whitestream. Therefore, as I worked through my collage, I attempted to make visible this constant negotiation of the concrete and the theoretical. Each time I attempted to focus my collage, to create a vision or respond concretely to one of the four collage-making provocations, I was again (de)railed by my own (un)knowing and (un)learning. I titled the collage, Untitled. which Laura jokingly-not-jokingly called cheating, but, although cliché, Untitled. represented how much un/re/learning I have to do.

With each of the focus group engagements, I reflected deeper on how I had been upholding whiteness↔antiBlackness by focusing primarily on concrete examples of Black livingness as opposed to rooting my pedagogies in Black ways of living and being. In doing so, I came to realize that my teaching did not always align with how I talk about race and racism in early childhood spaces. Failing to de-center white ways of teaching and learning in my pedagogies led to my maintaining justice-centered early childhood practices as curricular additives. Like Laura, I engaged in quiet humbling reflection throughout the focus group session, and it wasn’t until I was asked what the title of my collage was that I vocalized the un/re/learning I have to do. By practicing critical humility (Sealey-Ruiz, 2020) and making visible my un/re/learning of justice-centered pedagogies and practices in early childhood spaces, I re-implicated myself in whiteness↔antiBlackness so that I might move across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy in interrogating race and racism in early childhood spaces.

Discussion & Conclusion: Making Sense of Our Co-Constructed Knowledge

Artmaking holds space for us to creatively problematize and (re)imagine past-present-future histories of whiteness↔antiBlackness (Love, 2019). The acts of individual and collective artmaking in this focus group session, moved Elizabeth, Laura, and I into a space of dis/comfort from which we were able to

critically reflect on how our ways of being, living, doing, and teaching are rooted in race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness. “Not artist” discourses pushed us into a hyphenated space of “un-know[ing]” (Pindyck, 2018, p. 19), a tactile un-learning. As we (re)learned the collage materials, we also (re)learned ourselves and our (in)complicity in race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness. Put another way, dis/assemblage created space for us to extend our visual racial literacies through critical reflexivity so that we might engage more deeply with justice-centered pedagogies and practices in our early childhood spaces (Acuff & Kraehe, 2022).

Through artmaking as “re-making” (Kraehe & Brown, 2011, p. 505), we created dis/assemblages and challenged our own white ways of teaching and learning. As we explored disruptions and reifications of race and racism tactilely, we also negotiated them through our conversations with one another. By critically reflecting multisensorially with our pedagogies and practices, we were able to challenge our own whiteness↔antiBlackness and how it might inform our work in early childhood spaces (Hamlin & Restler, 2021). For example, in previous analytical artmaking of my photograph, I had realized that my centering of Black livingness focused primarily on concrete ways to refuse single narratives of Blackness (Adichi, 2009). Problematizing single narratives of Blackness with young children is critical to doing justice-centered work in early childhood spaces (Adichi, 2009; Gardner et al., 2020; Parks et al., 2022). However, I came to know how my centering of Black livingness remained a curricular additive as opposed to being interwoven as the fiber of my teaching (Kuh et al., 2016). Dis/assemblage during the focus group session became a space for me to communicate this tension, both tactilely and orally, as it pushed me to think about how I might root my pedagogies and practices in Black ways of living, being, doing, and thinking (Boutte et al., 2011).

As our critical friendship grew, we also began to challenge one another’s employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness. Encountering our un/knowing and un/learning of whiteness↔antiBlackness as a collective resulted in further dialogue, critical reflexivity, un/certainty, and risk-taking (Restler et al., 2021). In our three hours together (which was one part of a larger project), we created a space where pushback was both accepted and (often) welcomed. Laura, Elizabeth, and I spent time grappling aloud with how race and racism moved across-between-within-beyond our early childhood spaces. As critical friends, we encouraged one another to confront the motivations and ethics behind our ways of living, being, doing, thinking, and moving (Brandenburg & McDonough, 2019). For example, when Laura asked Elizabeth if all of the children in her class had been born outside of the United States, she gently pushed Elizabeth to question her understandings of *Americanness* (Packer et al., 2016) and citizenship. While gentle nudging seemed to work well for most of our conversations, there were times when more explicit challenging was needed. When Laura wondered if she focused “too much” on Blackness, I felt this moment called for more direct objection. In using my own work as an example, I explained how forefronting proBlackness in our pedagogies and practices, in dialogue with people of Color and intersectionally marginalized communities, might lead to emancipatory early childhood experiences for all children, families, and communities.

There were times that implicating ourselves in whiteness↔antiBlackness felt too hard (Acuff & Kraehe, 2022) and we dysconsciously positioned ourselves within the safety of white denial and white comfort, allowing white talk into our space. As white mothering early childhood educators with similar values and beliefs, our positionalities, in many ways, had overlapping and intersecting commonalities. And, while these commonalities helped us create strong critical friendships (Jara & Russell, 2022), they also enabled our complicity in white immunity and domination. Throughout the focus group, each of us made bids for approval, seeking acceptance for our employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness. And, in some of these instances, we were met with forgiveness, comments that said *It’s okay, that doesn’t make you one of the bad white people*. For example, although Elizabeth, Laura, and I grappled with what it means to have “hard” or “difficult” conversations around race and racism, we evaded how white security had shielded us from having to discuss race and racism from a young age (Acuff & Kraehe, 2022). Sitting within the comfort of our whiteness↔antiBlackness, we chose to remain un-racialized, using language that ignored how conversations around whiteness↔antiBlackness are only “hard” or “difficult” for white people.

The layered analytical practices illustrated in this article have uncovered how artmaking might help hold whitewomen accountable for (our) employments of whiteness↔antiBlackness. Through individual and collective artmaking, we came to know our own reifications of race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness. The multiple and layered encounters with our photographs pushed us to move in new-to-us ways and through dis/assemblage, written artist statements, and critical friend discussions, we began to learn how our conceptualized justice-centered early childhood spaces might be both maintaining and disrupting race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness. Dis/assemblage enabled us to physically (our photographs) and metaphorically (ourselves) take apart so that we might make new, different, more critical versions (Kraehe & Brown, 2011). The work posits dis/assemblage as pivotal to the critical reflexivity of whitewomen and shows a need for white educational researchers to move away from methodologies that prioritize only oral and written methods of data collection. It illustrates how artmaking with – from.alongside – white co-researchers pushes us to not only dis/assemble our ways of living and being whitely but to dis/assemble our early childhood spaces as white spaces (Taylor & Giugni, 2012).

Because this resistance work is never finished, I have humbly offered (un)final understandings (Bell et al., 2023) of what it means to move across-between-within-beyond allyship, activism, and co-conspiracy. Leaning on the work of Chicana feminist Anzaldúa (2015), I theorize our co-produced knowledges and understandings as (un)final to illustrate the continuous building, breaking, and re-building of self needed for whitewomen to excavate race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness from our ways of living and being. While the study itself may be completed, our racial literacies will continue to change overtime. As a critical friend community, we came to recognize that, while the study itself has ended, our justice-centered work moves non-linearly, forward-backward-this-way-and-that, as we continue to (un)settle race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness in our personal and professional lives. It is our collective hope that other white early childhood educators will read our stories and join us - literally and metaphorically - in holding meaningful spaces for critical reflexivity so that we might continue (or begin) to excavate our race, racism, and whiteness↔antiBlackness from early childhood spaces and support one-another to move with/in the tangles of justice-centered work.

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