# Affective Anti-Racism Learning: Navigating Anger in a Mutual Aid Group

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## Abstract

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Within the learning sciences, affect has often taken a backseat in literature even though it is inextricable from our learning processes. In this paper, I explore the affective dimensions of learning anti-racism, exploring a person's affect while they takes action towards materially benefiting a racially oppressed group. I present data from conversations I had with research partners (n = 3) about their experiences acting with the intent to materially benefit BIPOC. Informed by ethnographic methods, we had weekly one-hour conversations for over a month and a half to hone in on their affective anti-racism learning. Here, I focus on one research partner's experience working with a mutual aid group in Seattle and distributing resources to unhoused residents at an encampment. We had conversations about her emotional responses, particularly anger, when she learned that a police sweep was about to happen to the encampment. Findings from this study motivate further theorizations of affect and anti-racism learning with the affordances of present learning theories.

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## Introduction

Within the learning sciences, affect has often taken a backseat in literature through exclusion or through de-centering affect as "an external force on learning" (Vea, 2020, p. 314). Often, affect is described as a motivational factor for learning, emotional responses that push learners towards or away from learning something (e.g., Jaber & Hammer, 2015). This is different from how anger became implicated in one of the research partner's learning process as the *target* of anti-racism learning. The anti-racist position that the partner, Sandy, strived toward is affective and I would like to push forward the idea that anti-racism learning is inherently affective. This view of affective learning is not contradictory to theories in the learning sciences (see Dernikos, et. al., 2020; Vea, 2020). In fact, the sociocultural theorist Vygotsky (1987) maintained that affect is inextricable from the development of our thoughts and practices. However, little has been written within the learning sciences on anti-racism as an affective endeavor. In this paper, I re-center affect in the process of learning, exploring what I shorthand as *affective anti-racism learning*, the affective dimension of learning that takes place when a person acts to materially benefit a racially oppressed group. Aligning with the call for an "affective turn" within educational research (Clough, 2007; Dernikos et al., 2020), this study builds on learning sciences and affect theory literature to explore how individuals learn anti-racism in informal spaces with attention to their affect.

Research partners in this study chose to or already participated in actions that they considered anti-racist, and we had regular conversations about their experiences. As part of our continuing conversations about affect and anti-racism learning, Sandy, a research partner who is a White woman, decided to join a mutual aid group focused on providing resources for unhoused residents. The quote below was recorded while Sandy talked about the day she realized that a

police sweep[1] might soon happen to the encampment. Sandy told me she felt angry, but I could also hear how she debated between different expressions of anger, such as when and where to express her anger vocally, and if she should turn her energy to distributing resources to the residents instead of vocalizing her anger. While we talked and Sandy weighed her choices, she mentioned that another White group member's loud and expressive anger just did not "feel like a solidarity mindset."

> "To me, I have the feeling that [he] doesn't [emulate] … that energy… and again this is me making an assumption, and also based on just kind of his vibes that day or how he acted, but *this doesn't feel like a solidarity mindset*."
>
> – Sandy, 2022

As Sandy tried to describe why she did not want to emulate the other group member's behavior, she continued to talk about how the group member made her *feel*, that his expression of anger made her *feel* uncomfortable and did not *feel* like a solidarity mindset. From this brief description, we may observe how sifting through different emotional responses seemed to be *a part of Sandy's learning process* as she tried to work out what did feel right when being in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) living in the unhoused community.

By calling attention to affect and anti-racism in learning, the relationship between affect and race is undeniably central to this paper. Here, the research questions are:

- How is affect implicated in the adult research partners' anti-racism learning in informal learning contexts?

[1] When unhoused residents are forcibly removed from their living area by police and other government officials.

- How do the prior experiences and racial positionalities of the partners shape their affective anti-racism learning?

The analysis presented here circles around the assumption that affect and race are historically mutually constitutive, the organization of racialized subjects involves affective measures and positionalities to maintain structures of racial hierarchies (Ahmed, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Fanon, 2008; Palmer, 2017). In this sense, the affect I write about leans away from a psychological assessment of moment-to-moment physiological sensations and focuses on the ways that affect holds societal meanings and functions (Ahmed, 2013; Clough, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002). Learning is then implicated by the insight that learners are situated within a social context that is interwoven with racial and affective narratives and that learning processes involve a continual mediation of our racial and affective understandings. Here, I attempt to unpack these layers using poststructural perspectives and sociocultural learning theories, unveiling different sides of affective anti-racism learning by shifting between the affordances of different learning theorizations. These analytical shifts suggest that the process of affective anti-racism learning is winding, continual, and contextual. What I would like to propose here is that there rarely exists an affective position that whole-heartedly contributes to either anti-racism or racism (if the two are even mutually exclusive). Contrary to the instinct that empathy might be central to anti-racism, I find that consistent examination and management of the existing affective strategies of racism might be more effective.

Thus, this paper focuses on exploring how anti-racism learning is affective. The structure of the paper begins with a brief description of the study context; I provide some background information about the unhoused communities and mutual aid groups in Seattle, where the research partner was active during the study. Then, I draw from literature within the learning

sciences and affect theory to develop my conceptual framework on the relationship between affect and race, as well as how affective learning could be theorized. My theoretical assertions and assumptions here ground my research methods. In the section that follows, my methods section, I include my research design, data analysis methods, my positionality, and my research partner's positionality. I then deliver the findings over four sections, starting with an overview of the events that the research partner experienced before approaching affective anti-racism learning in these events from three different learning perspectives. Each successive learning perspective gradually pulls the focus "outwards", examining Sandy's perception before shifting to her position within the mutual aid group and within a racial narrative. While race is implicated throughout the findings, the final findings section hones in on race, racism, and Whiteness as the underlying context in Sandy's affective anti-racism learning. Towards the end of this paper, I reflect upon the research design and discuss the implications of this study.

## Unhoused Communities and Mutual Aid Groups in Seattle

Out of the three research partners, two decided to dedicate their time in this study to working with local mutual aid groups in Seattle. After just moving to Seattle from California in 2020, I was quite unfamiliar with these local organizations and was curious about the thriving culture of mutual aid groups in this city. According to a local Seattle newspaper, *The Stranger*, "[d]uring the [continued] Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020, Seattle saw a renaissance of mutual aid" and the growing popularity of the book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis*, written by Dean Spade, a professor of law at the Seattle University School of Law (Krieg, 2021). In this book, Spade (2020) defined three core elements of mutual aid: 1) meeting survival needs and building a shared understanding of why people's needs are not met, 2) mobilizing people, expanding solidarity, and building movements, and 3) depending

on participatory and collective action. This book, the local Seattle news, and the context of our pandemic times were in my mind while I sought to understand the working theory and philosophy behind the Seattle mutual aid groups.

On the ground, most of the mutual aid groups that the research partners considered collaborating with focused on housing insecurity during the pandemic. Patterns of inadequate housing are emblematic of structural racism, with well-known examples such as redlining and its continuing effects on Black communities (Oliver & Shapiro, 2008). Seattle's housing issues are longstanding as the city has failed to provide adequate housing for many of its residents, with especially Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations disproportionately over-represented in unhoused residents (King County Regional Homeless Authority, 2022; King County Government, 2020). With the impacts of the pandemic, there was at least a 50% increase in tents in Seattle during 2020, mostly centered in the Chinatown-International District and the Pioneer Square District (Greenstone, 2021). Unhoused residents usually arrive from highly gentrified areas to form encampments in these predominantly Asian and Asian American neighborhoods, since they are often comprised of a blend of businesses and residential homes, marked as "non-residential", and unavailable to most commercial real estate developments (personal communication with Wing Luke Museum staff, 2021). In combination with the increase of tents in 2020, there was also an increase in police sweeps in Seattle, when unhoused residents living in tents were forcibly removed:

> "During sweeps, city employees can destroy tents, throw away belongings the city doesn't want or is unable to store, issue parking tickets or even impound vehicles that unhoused individuals use for shelter, and install hostile architecture that keeps people from coming back to sleep on benches in city parks." (Kim & Oron, 2020)

Amongst mutual aid groups, there is recognition that housing insecurity is rooted in racism amongst other axes of oppression (e.g., ableism, heteronormativity, transphobia) and that efforts by mutual aid groups are temporary solutions to systemic problems (Syed, 2022). There is a call to do as much as one can as an individual, as a "good neighbor," while remembering that the community is living under "disaster capitalism"; the groups are responding to failed accountability from the government and other larger entities (Krieg, 2021). Particularly regarding the mutual aid group that Sandy participated in, the group met regularly to distribute resources to unhoused communities and to read books on racism. In all of this, there seems to be some reflexivity in these groups. While there remains critique on whether mutual aid groups challenge the systemic status quo, members seem to believe that supporting unhoused communities is an act against racism or at least an act that alleviates the effects of racism.

## Conceptual Framework

This paper draws from various bodies of literature but is mainly influenced by two theoretical forces: learning theories and affect theory. Generally, affect theory considers affect as the continuous flux of "intensities that augment and/or diminish a body's capacity to act" and that we are always in this flux (Dernikos, et. al., 2020, p. 5)[2]. This includes the more common conceptions of feelings (e.g., feeling happy, sad, angry) as well as the "intensities" or "forces" that guide our thoughts and behaviors (Dernikos, et. al., 2020; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). There is a certain directionality and valence to this definition of affect. Affect is not a mere tension or feeling that comes and goes, but instead, we are constantly in an in-between position with various force-relations persuading us to stay or move this way or that (Gregg & Seigworth,

[2] There is some debate between affect theorists about the differentiation between affect and emotion, which I will briefly touch upon later. For more on this, see (Palmer, 2007).

2010). For example, we can imagine how food commercials might inspire us to eat certain things. There is a desire and want that we experience, but perhaps also some physiological as well as psychological effects that move us without articulation or intuitive control.

About learning, we may then theorize how affect implicates practice. Vea's (2020) theorization of *emotional configurations* in the learning sciences offers an encompassing outlook on affect and learning. Vea (2020) describes emotional configurations as the "situated and reciprocal interrelationships between feeling, conceptual sense-making, and practice (including linguistic practice) that give emotion social meaning in the learning of individuals and collectives" (p. 315). Emotional configurations then highlight quite a few things about affect: a) affect is situated in social contexts, b) we feel affect as subjective, physiological experiences in our biological bodies, c) affect has a discursive nature that communicates and enacts certain intentions, d) affect is embedded in practice and can also be a form of practice (in the sense of emoting/expression and in emotional management) (Vea, 2020). In this section, I will explore how these different emphases about affect contextualize the study's analysis of affective anti-racism learning.

**Affective Dimensions of a Racialized Society**

While less discussed in the learning sciences, there were always works that delved into the historical relationship between race and affect (e.g., Burke & Brown, 2021; Fanon, 2008; Hong, 2020; Lorde, 1984). These writings portray our societies as steeped in affective relations with the Other, depicting the process of Othering as affective. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2019) mentions that racialization marks a certain group as "savage" and "dangerous" and, consequently, "its members are feared and seen [as] in need of supervision and civilization" (p. 3). Here, fear is described as a "strategy" of racism, maintaining and governing racial

hierarchies. In many other instances, we may observe that the racial stratification of power and privilege prescribes an affective politics, such that racism builds upon an affective foundation and that race, as a social construct, contributes to the way that we feel and interpret the world through feeling (Ahmed, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Doharty, 2020; Palmer, 2017).

This understanding holds important implications for the learners in this study, that our positions are never neutral and that we are constantly implicated in broader affective and racialized power dynamics. In this section, I introduce several perspectives inspired by poststructural theory to ground my analysis of the affective dimensions within a racialized society. I first describe how discourse creates subjects and how affect, since discursive in nature, can be analyzed in a discourse-like manner. Then, I describe how *affect creates racial subjects*, how certain affective qualities can escape discourse but still contribute to the subject-making of racialized beings. This framing is critical for exploring affect and anti-racism learning, exploring topics such as the subject-making of racialized learners and the practices commonly deployed by racialized learners in a racialized society.

For the purposes of this paper, I will briefly describe several theoretical underpinnings of poststructural theory that influenced my analysis without presenting a full introduction of the theory. Broadly speaking, poststructural theory is recognized for its focus on how power functions through discourse to create various effects (Peters & Burbules, 2004; Shah & Leonardo, 2016). Here, I approach discourse as the integration of various language-like "stuff" that is not limited to words and text but could include various oral, textual, visual, spatial, and kinetic elements that position people and social phenomena, such as photos, architecture, actions, etc. (Gee, 2004; Shah & Leonardo, 2016). Another focus of poststructural theory is how power is exercised through discourse to constitute subjects (i.e., different "genres" of being). Subjecthood

is then not self-evident or independent, but historical and contingent on power relations (Foucault, 1980). This way of analyzing then acknowledges the limitations of individual agency— while we can learn anti-racism, we are also bound within racial narratives.

A poststructural analysis of affect might then examine discourse related to affect to explore what affect *does* and what its effects are. For some affect theorists, there is a definitional distinction between affect and emotion (Palmer, 2017). Whereas affect includes the ineffable, the bodily sensations that escape discourse, emotion can be defined as "the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of experience" (Massumi, 2002, p. 28). Following this thought, emotional responses encapsulate most of our day-to-day understanding of feelings, such as the articulation to others or ourselves how we are feeling (e.g., ecstatic, annoyed, frustrated, etc.). Of course, there are also emotional responses that are discursive but not purely textual, such as tears streaming down someone's face or words blurted out with an angry force. In this paper, I loosely follow this distinction between affect and emotion by using *emotional responses* to describe common "discrete[3]" affective states (e.g., angry, happy, sad) and *feelings* to describe more colloquial understanding of affect. Mostly, I refer to *affect* and pay attention to the ways that discursive affect "moves through" learners to re-create and negotiate racial hierarchies. In other words, I pay attention to how affect described in this study's data, data garnered from interpersonal and "micro" interactions, might speak to broader, "macro" racial narratives. This study then builds upon works outside of the learning sciences that observe affect and race through discourse. For example, Ahmed (2004) draws from texts on the Aryan Nations website to describe *affective economies*, the repetitive cycles of attaching meaning to affect that reinforce material and

[3] Again, I note that affect is thought of as continuous and not discrete. However, how we describe affect day-to-day usually implies some kind of discrete-ness.

relational effects. From the website excerpts, Ahmed (2004) examined the connection between patriotism and hate towards the Other, hate disguised as a virtuous love, which has material and relational consequences (e.g., the hoarding of wealth in White communities, the segregation of White and BIPOC communities).

At the same time, there are warnings against the complete "discoursivation" of affect, recognition that there are some felt textures of social life that exceed language presentations (Reckwitz, 2012; Vea, 2020). Take for example *Therapeutic Nations* (Million, 2013), which bridged Foucauldian analysis with Felt Theory to examine the discursive and the affective. Million (2013) foregrounded Indigenous subjectivity in Canada's abusive residential schooling history to introduce colonialism as "a felt, affective relationship" (p. 46). At times, *Therapeutic Nations* (Million, 2013) described affective technologies that governed and disciplined what Indigenous peoples *should feel* by analyzing discourse presented in Indigenous poetry, Indigenous testimonies, legislative texts, and various reports from non-governmental organizations. However, Million (2013) also articulated the need for Felt Theory in conjunction with discourse analysis, pointing out that there is a "vitality and intensity of the forces that are beyond the words and discourses of any moment" which could be described as "our lived sensory being-ness" (p. 30). These felt experiences contribute to subject-making in the same way that discourse constructs subject representations that then become "common sense" over time (Foucault, 1980). There are types of "emotionally charged meaning as common knowledge" (Million, 2013), felt experiences about subjects that "just feel right". For example, in an interview, a residential school teacher admitted that she had only begun to notice Indigenous people as humans: "We'd see them often—maybe a drunken Indian asleep in the back of a bus—and you'd think, 'Oh, Indian,' like you think lamppost, or tree, or dog" (Million, 2013, p. 47).

Million (2013) argued that the speaker was not ignorant to the fact that the Indigenous person is human, but she naturally compares the person to a category that she demarcates as nonhuman because *it just felt right*. In other words, there is a system of knowledge that imbues a felt experience about which "kind" of person does this and is this way, a feeling that says that racializing this person in this way is "common sense".

Finally, to round out these poststructual perspectives on affect and subject-making, I draw from Bonilla-Silva (2019)'s theorizations on *Racialized Emotions* (RE), affective processes specific to racialized societies, to organize several theorizations on how affect contributes to racial subject-making and racial hierarchies. Affect related to race is relational and group-based; a racial order is reproduced through affect as well as beliefs and actions. As noted earlier, Bonilla-Silva (2019) mentions that racialization in part marks a certain group as "savage" and "dangerous" and, consequently, "its members are feared and seen in need of supervision and civilization" (p. 3). Such affect is also central to the production of actors' racial subjectivity, as people experience their racialization both materially and affectively. There is a hierarchy of affect according to race, where the affect of the dominant race are normalized or treated with more care and urgency while the affect of other racial subjects are often ignored, dismissed, and silenced. Relatedly, Palmer (2017) theorized the unthinkability of Black affect, how slavery solidified the fungibility of Black bodies and affect so that Black affect is misconstrued and intentionally thought of as non-existent. Affect is also rational in the sense that it does something to uphold and reproduce racial privilege and subordination. For example, "[w]hen Whites express anger because people of color take 'their jobs' or exhibit disgust toward minorities' presence in 'their' neighborhoods, their emotions are real and consequential" (Bonilla-Silva, 2019, p. 8), regulating the flow of material resources as well as prioritizing White emotional

wellbeing. While I will not directly label the research partners' experiences as evidence for RE, these theoretical assertions guide my interpretation of our conversations and my theorization of affective anti-racism learning.

**Theorizing Affective Learning About Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism**

In learning sciences, there has been growing literature arguing that social action and politicization are forms of sociocultural learning processes (Curnow et al., 2019; Pham & Philip, 2021). There have also been works on learning within social movements, theorizing that changes in practices within social movements indicate learning on the individual and group levels (Erickson, 2021). Relatedly, we can also position anti-racism as something that people learn (Shah & Hou, 2022). For example, there is significant knowledge production in media and books on people's journeys navigating race, racism, and anti-racism (e.g., Boggs, 2016; Segrest, 1994; Shakur, 2020). There are also differences in the ways that institutions prioritize their funding to address racial justice, reflecting how organizations themselves also engage in learning (e.g., Garran, et. al., 2015; Ishimaru, 2020). The kind of anti-racism learning that I focus on in this paper theorizes learning that involves simultaneous transitions in affect, ideology, and practice from an individual's perspective.

Here, I am interested in the affective dimensions of anti-racism learning. Earlier, I described how racialization and racism are, in part, affective and, similarly, we could imagine that anti-racism involves an affective dimension. Anti-racism is defined here as an individual or systemic action-oriented stance against racism (Gillborn, 2004). We might intuitively associate anti-racism with feelings such as empathy and love, but there is not a binary mapping of certain feelings with either racism or anti-racism (if the two are even mutually exclusive), or a "goal emotion" to strive towards. Instead, striving towards anti-racism is an ongoing and never-

reaching process that involves affect in a nuanced manner. For example, during the height of Klan activity in the South, Mab Segrest, a White anti-racist activist, began to mirror her BIPOC colleagues' fear and suspicion toward White people (Segrest, 1994). Thus, there is a complicated and socialized relationship between affect and anti-racism, one that calls for further analysis if we want to understand the learning that takes place (Hou & Shah, 2022).

I frame affective learning in two ways for this paper, one drawing from sociocultural learning theories and another from situated theory. In contrast to the previous section where I observe affect and race from a zoomed-out perspective, here I zoom in on an individual's learning processes that involve affect. From a sociocultural lens, we can theorize affect as cultural artifacts (Hou & Shah, 2022; Shah & Hou, 2022). From this perspective, learning can be viewed as shifts in social practices or shifts in the mediation of cultural artifacts and tools (Wertsch, 1998). We can think of artifacts as mediational means for social practices. They can be as concrete as a bicycle that you can ride or as abstract as words that you utter. When cultural artifacts are available, they can be appropriated, which means that they are mediated for social practices or in other words, brought into oneself or made one's own (Wertsch, 1998). Considering affect as cultural artifacts then implies that they are means to create social practices, such as different understandings or behaviors. This resonates with the idea that affect could describe the different ideological commitments attached to a certain object (Ahmed, 2013). In the same example as before, we can observe how fear and distrust describe how one believes that a certain racialized group is "savage" and "dangerous" (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Fear and distrust then show that the labels "savage" and "dangerous" have been attached to certain racialized groups (e.g., stereotypes of the "angry black man").

Additionally, from a situated lens, we can theorize affect as social practices (Hou & Shah, 2022; Shah & Hou, 2022). In Lave & Wenger's (1991) work on communities of practice, learning is situated within particular sociocultural contexts as newcomers not only learn technical skills but also familiarize themselves with the experts' social activities, including particular social norms and meanings. The learning viewpoint of the newcomer is then thought of as "legitimate peripheral participant" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this position, the newcomer is not merely observing the experts, but participation and hands-on experience are crucial to their learning and to becoming a fully-fledged member of a community of practice. Here, social practices within a community of practice emphasize the relationality and interdependence of actors and society, as actors negotiate who they are and construct meaning about the society (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Considering affect as social practice then implies that affect plays a role in newcomers' learning as they become more involved in a community of practice. This resonates with the idea that affect has the potential to create surfaces that bound one community to and from another (Ahmed, 2013). For example, as mentioned, we can think of the fear and distrust towards racialized groups marked as "savage" and "dangerous" as factors that create an "us versus them" boundary. Then perhaps, there is an affective dimension to the newcomer's progression from legitimate peripheral participation to becoming an expert in an anti-racist community of practice.

**Framing White Paternalism and Racial Solidarity**

To understand the relationship between affect and anti-racism learning, particularly with White research partners, we must also define Whiteness and the ways that Whiteness persists to interrupt anti-racist efforts through paternalism. Here, Whiteness does not neatly map onto White people but points to the internationally oppressive system that values lighter skin color

(Leonardo, 2013). In this sense, aligning with Audre Lorde (1984) and a history of Black feminists who continue to critique the "mythical norm" (p. 194) of Whiteness, Whiteness has no essence, no foundation other than a shape-shifting form to maintain its own interests (Leonardo, 2013). Thus, I am not curious about White identity itself, but rather the intentional *processes* by which Whiteness establishes itself as an arbitrary norm, hoping to take on Whiteness as the center of critique, transformation, and abolition. This then creates a tension that this study lives alongside: How has Whiteness continued performative acts of anti-racism in this study? How can White research partners act in solidarity with BIPOC? I speculate that, perhaps, the actions of the research partners and researcher did not fall into an either performative or in-solidarity binary but arguably contribute to both and more.

Cole (2012), who coined and popularized the term "White-Savior Industrial Complex", asserted that White saviorism is not about realizing justice, but about fulfilling an affective racial script, about "having a big emotional experience that validates [White] privilege." A White Savior would see needs related to racism and other forms of oppression, yet "see no need to reason out the need for the need" (Cole, 2012), no critique of the institutions and systems at play, and no humility towards the agency of the communities in need. Relatedly, the ideology of White paternalism could be linked to White justifications for the horrors of slavery (Baldridge, 2017). In Sylvia Wynter's article *Sambo and Minstrels* (1979), the construction of the "happy-go-lucky irresponsible Sambo" (p. 149) reflects an anti-Black system that created an illusion of dependency from the de-humanized Black slave on the "benevolent" White slave-master. This framing of White saviorism and paternalism poses complications towards learning anti-racism through working with mutual aid groups to distribute resources to predominantly BIPOC unhoused communities. On the one hand, there was an immediate need for resources. On the

other, how might these distributions further embed or expose these racial narratives of dependency? During the study, the research partners and I continued to strive for a thorough examination of structural racism and position ourselves with humility. However, I lean on this framing to assert the limitations of agency with regards to anti-racism learning, that we are all still implicated within an affective racial script.

Turning towards the possible forms of racial solidarity, Freire's (1996) outline of solidarity includes a reckoning from the oppressors that acknowledges the oppressed as "persons who have been unjustly dealt with" (p. 50). Drawing from thick solidarity (Liu & Shange, 2018), racial solidarity also implies the radical belief in the inherent value of every being, while understanding that we would never be able to fully share the experiences of one another. Then, the aim of racial solidarity is not to achieve complete alignment between experiences, but rather the willingness to be led by those most directly impacted and a form of reflexivity that aligns historical analysis of oppression with actions that promote concrete change (Freire, 1996; Liu & Shange, 2018; Martinez, et al., 2021). While recognizing that aligning our experiences is insufficient and at times unachievable, this paper explores affective anti-racism learning beyond empathy or approaches for mutual understanding. In the following sections, I explore various affective positions and transitions as the research partners and I explored our anti-racism learning.

## Methods

This qualitative study used ethnographic methods (Bhattacharya, 2017) to engage three adults in Seattle, Washington, in weekly conversations about affect and anti-racism. The following section describes the study's research design and data collection, data analysis, and the positionalities of the researcher and the research partners.

**Research Design and Data Collection**

The study's design and methods for data collection were chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of the research partners' affective lives as they conducted work related to anti-racism. With our shared interest in racial solidarity, the research partners and the researcher mutually selected each other— the research partners "chose to work *with* me in addition to being chosen *by* me" (Paris, 2011, p. 140) to collaboratively learn about anti-racism. We met informally through our graduate coursework or our other professional capacities as graduate students. We had talked about anti-racism and racial solidarity while continuing to build friendships from our conversations before the study. As the opportunity came up to conduct a qualitative study for my graduate coursework, the research partners were also interested in creating a shared space to talk about our anti-racism learning through the study.

Since the focus is on anti-racism and cross-racial solidarity learning, the study did not limit the research partners by their racial identities, but I also considered the critical role of White individuals in countering racism, White privilege, and White supremacy. Two of the research partners are White women and one identifies as a South-East Asian woman. I hoped that mutual selection, our shared interests, and our friendships might focus our attention on our anti-racism learning and mitigate, while not eliminating, dishonest performances that might project imagined notions of "ideal" anti-racism leaning. In addition, while being mindful that conversations around racism and affect would invite vulnerability, I hoped that our friendships might allow for more effective and healing forms of repair and reconciliation when needed.

This qualitative study used ethnographic methods (Bhattacharya, 2017) to inform weekly conversations for roughly a month and a half. Each conversation was one-on-one between the research partner and the researcher and lasted for approximately an hour. This study was

conducted early in 2022, while international societies continued to soak in the lasting effects of the ongoing pandemic. With hybrid and virtual modalities becoming more commonplace and being associated with safety, I invited the partners to decide whether we would meet in-person or remotely. All the partners then chose to meet remotely, and we mostly talked in the comfort of our homes on Zoom. In total, we recorded 16 conversations[4], totaling more than 16 hours of audio and video recordings, which were then also transcribed.

The conversations were meant to accompany ongoing actions by the research partners that aimed to materially benefit BIPOC (e.g., distribute material resources to unhoused BIPOC, fund BIPOC with academic fellowships). Inspired by social justice commitments in participatory design research[5] (PDR) (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Booker & Goldman, 2016) and by Freire's (1996) conceptualization of praxis, the study attended to the research partners' agency to carry out impactful anti-racist actions while participating in the study and holding reflective conversations. In part, we tried to challenge the notion that participation in research studies should not interfere with the research partners' approaches towards the "outside world" and instead emphasized our agency and accountability as active members of our communities.

Appendix A provides scaffolding questions for the conversations (Bhattacharya, 2017)[6]. In reference to the importance of felt experience, I often prompted the research partner to talk about how they felt in a certain moment or how they were feeling in our conversation. While

[4] Each research partner and I met for at least 5 conversations. One partner and I met for 6 conversations since one conversation had to be cut short for her emotional safety. Also, the study still stretched over about a month and a half since sometimes we had schedule conflicts that led us to skip a week

[5] For the purposes of this paper, I focus on analyzing the data from an ethnographic perspective. But the data collected from this study will also be analyzed with PDR methods in a later time.

[6] This study refers to "conversations" instead of "interviews" to describe the intention to create a more equitable relation between the research partners and researcher to co-learn anti-racism.

formulating the conversation prompts, I sought to be careful about my researcher positionality and was wary of drawing a line between the study's conversations and therapy sessions by consulting with a psychology professor. To move away from a deficit-based perspective on learning, I also designed the prompts to focus on *both* admirable and poor examples of affective anti-racist learning. We had three different types of conversations: an opening conversation, several main conversations, and a closing conversation. In the opening conversation, we talked about the partners' self-identified racial identities and collaborated on identifying an area for ongoing actions aimed to be anti-racist and materially benefit BIPOC. This collaborative process ensured that the partners had agency and accountability in selecting their way of learning anti-racism. Over the rest of the conversations, the partners reflected on their anti-racist work in this area and their affect in relation to their work. Finally, in the closing conversation, we reflected on the study and how our interactions contributed to our anti-racism learning.

While holding the conversations, I also took immediate notes and recorded my reflections between the conversations in a running analytic memo. My notes also included my felt experiences at different times during the conversation, moments when I felt specific intensities about the research partner or our conversation. During the study, one of the research partners suggested journaling to capture in-the-moment emotional responses and record events that happen each week. While I proposed this idea to all of the partners, journaling was not a mandatory process, and I did not have access to any journal entries. This helped to maintain the partners' privacy and create a confidential space for reflection. However, sometimes partners chose to share from their journals in our weekly conversations.

**Data Analysis and Limitations**

After collecting the audio and video recordings as well as the transcripts from the conversations, I returned to my analytic memos and other notes to review the partners' main "story arcs" throughout the study. In this process, purposeful sampling (Emmel, 2013; Suri, 2011) narrowed down the data analysis focus on two out of the three research partners— partners who provided *explicit descriptions of their affect* while reflecting on their anti-racism learning. Both of these partners had voiced in our first few conversations the intention to participate in local mutual aid groups for the duration of the study, but only one was able to do so due to the safety constraints of the pandemic. For this paper, I focused on this partner, Sandy, and a particular incident that happened while she joined a mutual aid group to distribute resources to unhoused residents. This incident was central to our conversations throughout the latter half of the study and, thus, this paper focuses on our first conversation about this incident while still including snippets from later conversations about this incident. We had detailed conversations about emotional responses, particularly anger, related to her mutual aid group participation when she learned that a police sweep was about to happen to the encampment. The conversations we had about this incident illuminated how affect is intertwined with learning around race, racism, and anti-racism.

I focused on analyzing and qualitatively coding segments of these conversations (Miles, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). However, there were moments where Sandy could not effectively describe what she was thinking and feeling. Often, her words would trail off while she gestured with her hands and her face. Following Vea's (2020) suggestion against the complete "discoursivation" of affect, during the analysis I drew from my analytic memo on what I felt Sandy was feeling. But mainly, segments of the conversation centering on a recalled event or situation that prompted

intense feelings and dialogue about affect became the unit of analysis. That is, Sandy's descriptions of an event and her affect during that event would collectively count as a unit of analysis. For example, in a conversation, Sandy might recall a time when she felt a good deal of frustration. Her descriptions of *what happened* when she felt frustrated and *how she felt* at that moment as well as my notes during that particular part of the conversation were analyzed together. For example, in our conversation Sandy recalled a past experience when she was a teacher. She spoke about her interactions with her students, the immediate feedback she received from them, and what she learned from this experience. She then described what felt right in that situation, specifically what helped her feel like she was cultivating healthy and respectful relationships with her students. These thoughts trickled in and out of our conversation at different times, but I grouped these sentences in the transcript as one segment.

Segments were then inductively coded through open coding (e.g., new to the mutual aid group, discomfort around angry people), process coding (e.g., taking action beyond emoting anger, observing Friend's behaviors closely), and in vivo coding (e.g., "takng up space", "solidarity not charity") (Miles, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Following this initial analysis, I formed several themes by referring to the codes and the conceptual framework (see Appendix B, C, D, and E) (Harry et al., 2005). I also discussed these themes with colleagues through a peer debriefing process (Spall, 1998). After refining the themes based on peer debriefing and writing a draft of this paper, I invited Sandy to review my interpretation of our conversations. I shared my writing of her positionality and excerpts of the finding with her. We talked about whether she felt comfortable sharing the details I had written, whether the writing was accurate, and her thoughts that aligned or differed from my interpretation. Later, I incorporated her ideas and added several missing details. For example, we reworded her positionality statement to reflect

her childhood environment and her deeply negative experience at Teach for America. We also read through parts of the findings section together, which seemed mostly aligned with her perception. Also, there were segments of our conversations that I removed from the analysis because they were too personal for public consumption.

Lastly, with regards to limitations, I will point out that while the conversations provided rich insight into the partners' affect and reflections, the data is also limited by the study's focus on the partners' individual learning without depicting a broader landscape of learning between the partners and other stakeholders in the context. I will go into detail about this in a later section that critiques this research design.

**Sandy's Positionality**

Since I hone in on Sandy in this paper and how she navigated her anti-racism learning, her positionality is critical in understanding her experiences and analyzing our conversations. Identities that were frequently mentioned in our conversations and pertinent to the data analysis included her identities as a White person and as a woman. Sandy had grown up in a rural area in the Midwestern U.S. in a "very White, very religiously conservative working-class community." Later, she had some experience at Teach For America (TFA), where she began to question her role as a White teacher in predominantly Black and Brown schools. She raised several issues with TFA, which received strong pushback. The experience at TFA was extremely distressing and stressful for her. Later, she described that she lost faith in TFA and decided to listen more directly to BIPOC communities. After her time at TFA, she became more aware of racism and racial dynamics in the US and attended several protests, some with a higher risk of being arrested. In Seattle, she made friends with several people who had more experience with mutual aid groups and she decided to join their group as part of this study.

### Researcher Positionality

While all of my social identity markers and socialized experiences played a role in how I showed up to my research partners and how I conducted the study, here I foreground my racial and national identities since the study focused on race, racism, and anti-racism. I recognize myself as Han Taiwanese in Taiwan and am often perceived as East Asian American in the U.S. Informed by my own experiences as the dominant racial group in Taiwan and as a minoritized racial group in the U.S., I have realized how being a part of a dominant racial group can make ignorance to racism effortless. With these two contrasting perspectives, I had different points of resonation with both the White and South-East Asian research partners' racial experiences. This juxtaposition is one that I shared with my research partners and consciously engaged in throughout this study. I made it clear to my research partners that I was new to the racial context in the U.S. and that I would be learning alongside them. This, I hoped, would encourage more authentic and vulnerable conversations in the study. Also, as a person who grew up as part of the dominant racial group, it is not instinctual to me to think of everything as racialized. Throughout the data analysis, I was mindful of this to more aptly examine intangible and often overlooked racial dynamics.

## What Happened and Who was There?

In this section, I will describe the central incident that this paper focuses on, the actors, and the environment surrounding the incident. Sandy had chosen to work with a mutual aid group, contacted the group, and participated in her second resource distribution to unhoused residents with the group. This time, a person showed up claiming to care for the environment and who wanted to help clean the encampment, but in the past, this person and her organization discarded residents' belongings and even prompted police sweeps (i.e., likely reporting the

encampment to the city government and asking to remove the residents). When this person showed up, Sandy recalled a lot of tension at the encampment while different actors responded differently and tried to understand the situation differently. Here, I introduce the different actors (the Cleaner, Sandy's Friend, and the Newcomer) and their interactions with Sandy and each other.

The Cleaner is a White woman who leads an organization in Seattle that claims to collaborate with corporations for environmentally Friendly initiatives. However, according to Sandy, her Friends, and various Seattle news sources, the Cleaner often finds an unhoused resident as a "spokesperson" to agree to her organization's actions to "clean" an encampment. Then, the organization discards the residents' belongings, at times partnering with city officials for sweeps or drug raids. Sometimes, the "spokesperson" then appears on media coverages of the Cleaner to showcase her "charitable" work. In these media coverages, the Cleaner positions herself as a benevolent character who volunteers to take on the responsibility of relocating unhoused residents and clean the environment, when in fact her organization continues to destroy living spaces for unhoused residents, forcing residents to relocate without providing necessary resources to rehouse.

The Cleaner's presence at the encampment was alarming to Sandy's Friend, who was a more experienced member of the mutual aid group and knew about the Cleaner. The Friend is also a White woman. From conversations with Sandy, I learned that Sandy admired her Friend and often deferred to her when she was unsure about what to do in the mutual aid group. When the Cleaner showed up, she asked Sandy's Friend about collaborating, which Sandy's Friend refused. While talking with the Cleaner, the Cleaner repeated questions such as, "Don't you care about the environment? There are needles everywhere." Her Friend then left the conversation

and decided to prioritize distributing resources and information about the Cleaner to the residents. Her Friend wanted the residents to know that the Cleaner usually finds a "spokesperson" and that a sweep might happen after she leaves.

From Sandy's descriptions of her Friend's interactions with the residents, her Friend seemed to have established relations with specific BIPOC living in the encampment and prioritized checking in on them. Sandy named particular residents who usually greeted her Friend warmly and shared information about the needs of the encampment. These residents were Black and Vietnamese and lived in Structures, house-like shelters built with pallets and surrounding materials that were larger and sturdier than tents. These residents were a representation of leadership in the encampment and were respected in the community. Because of this, Sandy's Friend reached out to these residents more often to ask about the needs of the encampment. The mutual aid group had chosen this encampment since it was one of the larger and more permanent encampments in Seattle. In the encampment, Sandy perceived most of the residents as BIPOC. Many asked about who the Cleaner was when she arrived. The residents who lived in the Structures helped other residents trust the mutual aid group's information about the Cleaner. Some of the residents angrily argued and yelled at the Cleaner after either engaging with her or learning about her from the mutual aid group.

On the other side of the encampment, Sandy did not interact with the Cleaner or witness most of the interactions with her Friend. Instead, Sandy distributed resources to residents with a new member of the mutual aid group, the Newcomer. The Newcomer is a White man who also mentioned that outside of the group, he worked as a security guard. He had not been to the group's resource distribution before and was very vocal about his anger toward the Cleaner. While Sandy was next to the Newcomer, she felt very uncomfortable and did not interact much

with him. In our conversation, we continued to process the situation and her feelings about the Newcomer's anger.

## Comparing Different Expressions of Anger

When the Cleaner arrived at the encampment, most of the other actors (Sandy's Friend, the Newcomer, and Sandy) became angry about the Cleaner's presence. Many were angry that the Cleaner claimed to be an environmentalist, but that she usually prompted sweeps and other harmful acts towards the encampment. As Sandy and I debriefed the day when the Cleaner showed up at the encampment, we then started talking about how anger was expressed differently by different actors. Observing and recalling the different actors' anger, Sandy tried to figure out what kinds of affective positions and representations made sense to her. In particular, the Newcomer's expression of anger did not seem productive to Sandy, and she tried to contrast the Newcomer's expression with her other experiences with anger. Throughout this section, we can observe how different actors' affect and Sandy's affect from different points in her life can be viewed as artifacts that are mediated in her anti-racist learning.

Sandy recalled that the Newcomer kept cursing the Cleaner in front of the residents, while not directly at the Cleaner. Sandy said that this expression of anger did not seem productive to her. When I asked what parts of the Newcomer's reaction made her feel uncomfortable, she mentioned worries about escalating the situation and becoming "the catalyst for getting someone in trouble." She recalled moments while the Newcomer cursed the Cleaner, and residents responded, "yeah I'm going to tell her off and I've got my hatchet." Here, this seems to resonate with affect's potential to *do something*, that the Newcomer's and the residents' emotional responses could have material consequences that contribute to a racial order. Sandy reasoned that

if a physical fight had broken out, the blame and punishment would likely fall more heavily on the BIPOC residents than the White Newcomer. Sandy shared:

> *"[I was] worried about having energy like that and also having somebody who is that quick to anger in like these dynamics where we're guests here. So, I think that was frustrating. You're a guest here, be a guest."*

Sandy kept affirming that the Newcomer's anger on behalf of the residents made sense and that his emotional responses were valid. However, she did not feel that this was the best time and place to focus on "getting anger out of your body." Being the most "vocally upset person" when you are not impacted or at risk seemed "self-serving" or unrightfully "taking up space." In parallel, Sandy explained that she felt similarly when she had discussions about racism in her graduate coursework. She recalled experiences where, as a White person, she felt that she should not be the loudest person in a room while discussing the horrors of racism with colleagues of Color. In her worries about "taking up space", there seemed to be a worry about how a racial hierarchy of affect functions, where the dominant race's affect is centered and normalized while silencing the affect of minoritized races. She felt that she could be rightfully angry about racism and let her colleagues of Color know that she agrees with condemning racism, but she should leave space for colleagues of Color to speak.

> *"I feel like I've just seen a number of times, where [White] people's anger feels disproportionate, disconcerting. I just want to step away. It almost seems volatile. Not that this anger doesn't belong to you, but it's like you just got really mad really quickly about something that doesn't affect you. I feel like when I see people do that to me that feels like a red flag. It feels like it's hiding something. I don't know if I'm describing this well, but it feels like that's not genuine."*

As she remembered previous encounters with disproportionate expressions of anger from White people, she highlighted the volatile and dishonest nature of these expressions, which seemed to resonate with the Newcomer's reactions. There is a stark contrast between the volume of anger from these White individuals and their lack of direct experience, which might make one wonder if the anger was performative, signaling proof that one is "not racist" and possibly a "racial ally" without *doing* something at that moment that exemplifies anti-racism. While we are unable to verify the affect or intentions of her White colleagues from Sandy's story, their affective expressions seemed to play an important role in how Sandy perceived the ongoing racial dynamics.

As Sandy continued to process what made her feel uncomfortable about the Newcomer's anger, she continued to provide examples of anger that felt healthy and justified, examples recalled from her past experiences. Once, Sandy was hospitalized in a partial hospitalization program where she met a White woman who experienced addiction and unstable housing.

> *"She talked about needing a space to be able to just scream and sometimes she would just be very angry in group, but she just needed to express that. Everything felt so awful, and she just needed to scream sometimes and it's okay."*

Again, Sandy made a connection between healthy, rightful, loud expressions of anger and direct negative experiences. In comparison, Sandy seemed to wonder whether her Whiteness, access to housing, and other dominant and privileged positionalities meant that she should not be the most vocally angry person at the mainly BIPOC encampment.

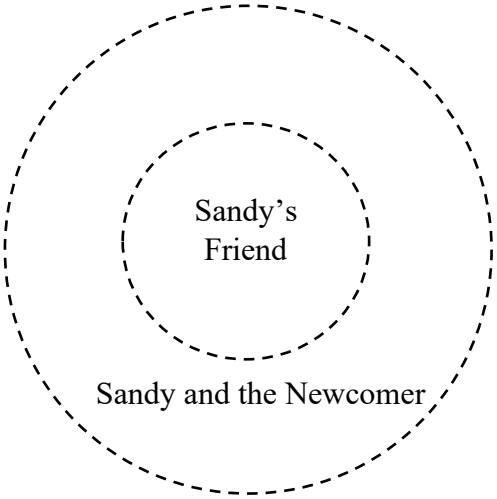
By talking through and mediating different examples of anger in our conversations, Sandy seemed to be able to process different expressions of anger and figure out how she would like to approach anger herself. While affect does not neatly map onto anti-racism (i.e., there is not a

"goal anti-racist emotion" to work towards), we can observe some connections between affect and becoming anti-racist, connections that Sandy is making on what *feels* like racial solidarity. While what Sandy felt is not the definition of racial solidarity, we can observe how affect played a role in her learning about racial solidarity. The different affect that Sandy observed and reflected upon were appropriated as cultural artifacts to help Sandy process why the Newcomer's behaviors did not feel like racial solidarity. By appropriating these artifacts, Sandy was able to imagine and create new practices, weighing which way of expressing anger seemed most appropriate to her. She did not agree with the Newcomer's expression of anger. Instead, she referred to her Friend's commitment to not escalating situations and spreading information to the residents.

## Aspiring Towards Different Affective Anti-Racist Practices

After we talked about the Newcomer's anger, we explored interactions that Sandy felt were admirable or appropriate. Sandy's Friend was often someone that Sandy turned to for advice and inspiration. For Sandy, the Friend was someone who modeled important practices of the mutual aid group while Sandy and the Newcomer were peripheral members learning about this community of practice (Figure 1). In this following section, we can observe how affect was not isolated from anti-racist practice, but rather were dimensions to the practices or even described as ideal practices (i.e., ideal methods of emoting/expression or emotional management) (Vea, 2020).

*Figure 1.* Sandy and the Newcomer were legitimate peripheral participants in the mutual aid group while Sandy's Friend was perceived as an expert.




While Sandy distributed resources, she felt that she could "see what the word solidarity means in person" as she watched the residents and her Friend interact. She watched the residents greet her Friend warmly and ask questions about the mutual aid group's resources and the Cleaner. Repeatedly, Sandy talked about how glad she was to see these "humanizing" interactions and how this represented "solidarity, not charity". In witnessing the relations between the residents and her Friend, Sandy seemed to be glad to see these mutually respectful interactions between the unhoused community and the mutual aid group because of the assumption that these were rare interactions between unhoused and housed individuals. Afterward, as I reflected on our conversation and Freire's (1996) vision of solidarity, I thought about the need for further political inquiry on housing insecurity in Seattle and its impacts, particularly on Black and Brown communities. From Sandy, I could hear the immense hope she had from witnessing these interactions, hope that is crucial and that might help her continue working with the mutual aid group. The assumption that these kinds of

respectful and humanizing interactions are rare manifests from histories of racial disparity. Once again, I am reminded of the innateness of structural racism within these interactions.

Another practice that Sandy admired about her Friend was how she "maintained composure" and was "spurred into action" after meeting the Cleaner. In addition, Sandy had noticed from her onboarding process a common practice within the mutual aid group of not escalating situations. As a peripheral member of the group, the Newcomer's expressions of anger did not seem to align with these practices. In contrast, after a few attempts, Sandy's Friend chose to stop arguing with the Cleaner, and immediately transitioned into sharing information with the residents:

> *"This is spurring me [her Friend] into action, being like, now we're just checking in, hey did you guys hear, this is who's here, do you guys mind sharing that with people, just letting people know this is what we know about her. That's kind of how they handled it and I know they were angry too."*

Here, anger was not suppressed, but seemed to accompany her Friend's actions to inform residents about the Cleaner. This is something Sandy wanted to learn to do in the future, even though at times she still felt too overwhelmed to follow suit. When the Cleaner arrived at the encampment, Sandy did not engage with the Newcomer but continued to distribute resources to the residents. Her intention here to work alongside anger for continued anti-racist action seemed to resonate with praxis and the need for racial solidarity to be action-oriented, particularly as she continued to reflect on how she could continue her actions amidst overwhelming feelings. In all, Sandy seemed to admire her Friend's practice of maintaining healthy and respectful relationships with the BIPOC residents and staying active even midst stressful situations.

The Friend's capacity to stay grounded in the present also seemed to help her be mindful and respectful while communicating with the residents, continuously building on their relations. While describing what felt right about the Friend's actions and how she co-constructed relations with the residents, Sandy raised an example from her teaching experience. The classroom might seem like a foreign context in comparison to the encampment, but Sandy drew from her experiences as a White teacher in a school with predominantly students of Color to process what racial solidarity and respectful relationships might be.

> *"I'm very relationship-oriented, but then also being mindful of I'm a White teacher stepping into these spaces that are predominantly People of Color and trying to have that awareness. I'm not saying I have it figured out but I'm saying I got a lot of in the moment feedback. Students let you know. There's that 'oh students have to respect teachers [mentality]', but students will let you know if they don't feel respected by you. Or [if] they don't feel like you see them as human, they're going to react a certain way. That is something that like I'm obviously carrying with me."*

She repeatedly mentioned that she was a "guest" in predominantly BIPOC spaces and that she should not "take up space." When her students were confused about particular concepts in class, she also mentioned that the respectful way to engage was not to complain about the difficulty of the concepts alongside the students but to try and engage with the students and provide information. She paralleled this example with the Newcomer and her Friend's reactions, how the Newcomer was vocally expressive yet inactive in comparison to her Friend. To Sandy, vocally

expressing negative emotional responses seemed less important and less respectful than trying to engage and help with the present situation.

In this section, I presented different practices that Sandy sought to emulate or avoid while working with the mutual aid group and with the unhoused residents, which reflects the intertwined nature of affect and practice. Sandy's Friend modeled practices of healthy and respectful relationship-building while the Newcomer's inaction did not feel right to her. Similar to the previous section, past experiences played an important role here as Sandy recalled her teaching experience to reason why she felt certain practices made more sense to her. Instead of viewing affect as cultural artifacts, in this section, we theorized affect as intertwined with anti-racist practices or as a form of anti-racist practice itself.

## Poststructural Perspectives on Whiteness and Sandy's Learning

So far, I have presented snippets of the conversation between Sandy and me after the Cleaner showed up, re-tracing the journey Sandy took to navigate what feels like racial solidarity. While I have approached Sandy's learning from her perspective, and the different examples of poor and better affective anti-racism practices that she negotiated, I would like to explore here how Sandy herself is situated within Whiteness and a broader racial narrative. In other words, in the previous two sections I have attended to Sandy's own agency in her learning while here I would like to explore how she is still embedded within the broader racial narrative. What is important to realize here is that except for most of the residents, all the other actors at the encampment were White (i.e., Sandy, Sandy's Friend, the Cleaner, the Newcomer). Zooming out, we can paint a mental picture of the racial dynamics at the encampment— White individuals provoking a sweep while White individuals distributed resources to residents who are mainly BIPOC. This is not an accidental or random racial situation. Instead, Sandy's account of that day

prompts us to think: What is the racial context that made this situation possible? How does this situation relate to broader racial contexts? Drawing from the idea that affect creates racialized subjects, this section describes how Sandy was implicated in various affective and racialized subjecthoods. In addition, I describe how Sandy *felt her way* towards and away from different White affective positions.

In the two earlier sections, Sandy compared her own anger with her Friend's and the Newcomer's. Curiously enough, she does not compare herself to the residents or the Cleaner, even though she described their anger in the conversation. When describing her relationship with residents and with the encampment, Sandy frequently referred to herself as a "guest". The only other time she referred to herself as a "guest" is when she spoke about her experience teaching students of Color. There is a distinct line drawn here with the word "guest". Not only does this imply a heightened need for carefulness and politeness, but in both situations, Sandy understands herself as a White person within a predominantly BIPOC space. In this sense, Sandy recognized anger and frustration from the residents and her students, but she does not assume that their affect is accessible to her. Instead, her felt racialized experience as a White person and prior understanding of race informed her that she was precluded from feeling what BIPOC feel. Sandy compared her expressions of anger predominantly to other White individuals—the other White members of the mutual aid group and the White women she met at the partial hospitalization program. In contrast, the residents' angry expressions were not available for Sandy as a warning, a model, or anything within reach. On one hand, there might be White paternalistic ideations here, an Othering of BIPOC affective experiences from being relatable. On the other, there seemed to be a fear of conflating BIPOC experiences with her own experience as a White person. Since we met during graduate school in Seattle, I wondered if our relatively liberal

education taught us that assuming that we are all the same prescribes color-evasiveness. But, regardless, these fears might still stand in the way of anti-racism learning.

Perhaps this also suggests that Sandy's goal to learn more about anti-racism and racial solidarity is more specifically a goal to learn these things *as a White person* and to approach an *affective subjecthood of an anti-racist White person*. When Sandy rejects the Newcomer's emotional responses, she says that "this doesn't feel like a solidarity mindset" while continuously pointing out the differences between the Newcomer and the residents based on their race, their residence, and their general access to resources. I interpreted this as Sandy's aim to find a subject position that is understood as White, anti-racist, and that feels right. She resists the Newcomer's position because he seemed to be unproductive in his expressions of anger. In other words, if he were so angry about the Cleaner, why not approach the Cleaner himself? Could his positioning as a White person who vouches against BIPOC harm automatically "promote" him as an ally? Could his anger here represent a type of White anti-racist positioning that Sandy disagrees with? In addition, Sandy raised concerns about the Newcomer's job as a security guard: "what does that mindset mean when your job is to inherently be suspicious of people?" She quickly followed up this statement by saying that she did not feel like this was the right "energy" or "vibes" for participating in the mutual aid group. I have concerns here about who should or should not be valid anti-racism learners, but primarily I could sense that she *felt her way* towards and away from different White affective positions.

Sandy also did not compare her anger to the Cleaner's anger, which seemed to bear all the hallmarks of White paternalism. This is not to say that Sandy did not participate in White paternalism or White saviorism at all, but that perhaps Sandy wanted to be as far removed from the Cleaner's Whiteness as possible. The Cleaner's apparent need for a "clean" environment was

prioritized over the residents' needs for a stable place to live, pointing to a racial hierarchy of affect where the Cleaner's affect was prioritized by the city over the residents' affect. To further speculate, I would also say that the contrast between "clean" and "dirty" might not only be related to the living circumstances of the unhoused residents but also re-creates the connection between "dirty" and darker skin color, emblematic of discourses of racism. This resulted in grave material consequences: sweeps, the forcible destruction of residential areas, and the removal of personal belongings. I visited the encampment roughly a month after the sweep, only to find the space void of people or any signs that people ever lived there. Sandy had told me that the city bulldozed the space after the sweep, and when I was there green grass stood nonchalantly over flat stretches of dirt. Sandy and the mutual aid group were unable to locate several of the residents, and this deeply impacted her. We spent an afternoon "off-record" processing and being candid about how we felt.

To conclude the events during the study, Sandy continued to participate in the mutual aid group. A few days before the police sweep happened, she took some time away and later showed up during the sweep to protest with the mutual aid group. At the time of writing this piece, the mutual aid group was in a transitional phase, re-grouping after a more condensed period of sweeps. Sandy continued to check in and participated when possible.

## Research Design Reflexivity

Throughout this study, I realized that in many ways the research design could be improved upon. First, while the analysis from our one-on-one conversations was generative, there were limitations on inter-subjectivity and BIPOC perspectives. From Sandy's descriptions, I could paint a picture of her relations and perceptions of the other actors, but I could not access what they might have said. With the inclusion of the residents' perspectives, there could be

explorations of how the mutual aid group's actions landed and fuller discussions of the residents' affect. Also, I wonder, what could be better studied if we saw learning as a collective activity? Here, the descriptions of learning focus on Sandy's journey, while anti-racism is depicted as highly relational. Designing this study in a different way, such as accompanying the learner myself or having interactions with more people in the same space, might provide needed analysis on anti-racism learning as a collective process.

In addition, there remains space for more care and attention in the framing of this study to research partners. To implement reflexivity and the racial justice aims of this study, I only chose research partners who already thought that they were acting toward anti-racism or planned to do so. Sandy had already been working with mutual aid groups before the study. However, connecting anti-racism with this study on learning might implicitly promote the idea that spaces for acting toward anti-racism are merely learning spaces. One scenario might be that an encampment becomes merely a learning ground for predominantly White mutual aid groups. In many ways, this would perpetuate racial dynamics described by Sylvia Wynters (1979), how the illusion of dependency could re-create the racial order while mutual aid group members learned to become "better anti-racist people".

Finally, for the time and length constraints of this paper, I was not able to dive more deeply into analyzing forms of affect that might escape discourse. Alongside this study's data analysis, I have reached out to several experts and colleagues in video and audio analysis. Their input and collaboration will be included in my continued research efforts on this study's data. As a teaser, some analysis that I hope to incorporate involve audio volume and pitch fluctuations as well as facial recognition.

## Discussion

The research questions for this study were: *How is affect implicated in the adult research partners' anti-racism learning in informal learning contexts? How do the prior experiences and racial positionalities of the partners shape their affective anti-racism learning?* To explore these questions, I analyzed affect mainly from three different perspectives: a) theorizing affect as cultural artifacts, b) theorizing affect as dimensions to anti-racist practices or as anti-racist practices themselves, and c) theorizing affect from a poststructural standpoint to examine how they contributed to broader racial narratives. The analysis that followed showed that affect was inextricably intertwined with broader racial narratives, anti-racism learning, the research partner's racial identity, and their prior experiences. Also, the analysis showed that affect is not distinct from actions, but is an inextricable part of anti-racist actions and learning, asserting that we should analyze how affect is situated and implicated in discourse as well as practice. Findings from this study could help understand the affordances of present learning theories and motivate new ways of describing and theorizing learning and affect.

One of the main takeaways from this study is the complexity of how affect relates to anti-racism learning. While many anti-racist and diversity training might focus on the important task of encouraging empathy or other discrete emotional states, I wonder how we could also support anti-racism learning by examining and managing the existing affective strategies of racism and anti-racism. For example, how Sandy aimed to become better at staying calm and grounded in "intense" situations so that she could continue distributing resources. Or how examining the connections between Whiteness and affect may point us towards affective structures that continue to contribute to racism. In addition, conceptualizations of thick solidarity as "a radical belief in the inherent value of each other's lives despite never being able to fully understand or

fully share in the experience of those lives" (Liu & Shange, 2018, p. 190) suggest that a complete resonation of experiences, the "ultimate" empathetic experience, might not be necessary for effective racial solidarity. Perhaps, there is not a "goal anti-racist emotion" but rather a continuous and never-ending process of learning that includes transitions in affect. We might not need to intentionally aim for a certain "emotional state", but rather become more adept at managing our affect as part of and a goal of our learning.

To continue this inquiry, I am curious about "affective cultures" that are intentionally cultivated in certain on-the-ground activist spaces. Similar to how the mutual aid group in the study prioritized not "escalating situations", I wonder if other activist groups cultivate an affective culture that underpins ideological commitments and social practices that the group believes will support their overall aim for racial justice. Often, if not always, communities lead academia in constructing knowledge and enriching our epistemic archives (e.g., Curnow, et. al., 2019; Erickson, 2021; Vea, 2020). Further collaboration with specifically BIPOC and cross-racial coalitions might guide our understanding of affective anti-racist learning.

In future work, there also needs to be more thorough attention to defining the body and memory, not only in the physiological and biological sense, but from a poststructural standpoint on how subjects are produced by discourse (Foucault, 1980) and thereby creating surfaces to bodies, informing how bodies are read, determining what happens to certain bodies, and informing a collective social memory for subjects with specific racial identities. In this work, we need to attend to the literature on the biological effects of race while reckoning with the arbitrary nature of racialization, how bodies are not necessarily racialized in the same way despite sharing biological ancestries or other similarities. Examples of this work might include *Dying of Whiteness* (Metzl, 2019), where the author describes the relations between nostalgia (e.g.,

slogans like “Make America Great Again”) and Whiteness, and how these relations contribute to a higher White mortality rate in the rural areas of several predominantly conservative states[7]. How does a collective social memory impact racialized bodies here?

In all, this study has examined how affect is embedded within anti-racism learning. By extension, I envision my future work to focus on how racial realism and the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992) *has an affective dimension*. This might contextualize the difficulty, perhaps even impossibility, in fundamentally shifting the affective commitments of Whiteness. I end here by speculating if that were true, how do we imagine more effective ways to learn anti-racism?

[7] In one case, a White individual was vehemently against easier access to medical insurance, believing that this would benefit “lazy” immigrants, while this person’s health was nearing fatal conditions because of their own lack of proper insurance (Metzl, 2019). In such case studies, we might ask how affect, memory, and bodies are implicated with racism and anti-racism.

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# Appendix A

Conversation Guide

**Opening Conversation: Racial Identities and Identifying a Professional Context for Future Anti-racist Reflections**

- Racial identities (e.g., How you prefer to be identified with respect to race? How do people tend to identify you with respect to race?)
- Centering anti-racism (e.g., Can you tell me a recent time that you realized you wanted to learn about anti-racism?)
- Identifying a context of focus (e.g., What are some areas in your life where you are working towards anti-racism and cross-racial allyship? Is there a particular area that stands out to you or that you would like to focus on for the next few weeks? What are some challenges that you face in this area? What are some highlights?)

**Main Conversations: Continued Reflection within a Specific Professional Context**

- Checking in (e.g., What are you learning about this week in terms of anti-racism?)
- Locating specific situations (e.g., Are there any notable events as you continued your anti-racist work this week? For example, points of tension, confusion, clarification, or things that went well.)
- Locating specific emotional shifts (e.g., Are there any changes in how you feel as you engaged in anti-racist work this week?)
- Exploring emotions (e.g., How did you feel in that situation? What were some of your bodily sensations? What did you do in response to those feelings? How do you wish to respond to those feelings moving forwards? Thinking back, do you think this emotion relates to a previous experience?)
- Exploring emotions in relation to anti-racism (e.g., When you felt that specific emotion, did it change how you participated in anti-racism? Could you elaborate on how these changes might or might not further anti-racism?)

**Closing Conversation: Documenting and Reflecting on the Changes Throughout the Study Process**

- Checking in (e.g., How have your anti-racist practices or understanding changed or stayed the same since our first conversation?)
- Examining the role of emotions in anti-racist practice (e.g., Thinking back to our past conversations, how do you think emotions impacted your anti-racist practices? Has your awareness of your emotions changed over the course of these conversations?)
- Assessing the impact of these interviews (e.g., Were there things that you found helpful or unhelpful in this study? In what ways did these conversations impact your anti-racist work?)
- Additional comments (e.g., Is there anything that I did not ask that you might want to share?)

## Appendix B

Codebook: Actors and their Actions

| Actor | Codes | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Cleaner | History of sweeps and drug raids | 4 |
| | Claiming to be an "environmentalist" | 2 |
| | Creating conflict with mutual aid group | 2 |
| | Showing up unexpectedly | 2 |
| | "we care about solving Seattle homelessness" | 1 |
| | Creating conflict with residents | 1 |
| | Intentionally seeking out the Friend | 2 |
| Friend | Checking on residents | 2 |
| | Prioritizing residents over the Cleaner | 7 |
| | Established relationships with residents | 3 |
| | Distributing resources | 1 |
| | Providing information about the Cleaner to the residents | 3 |
| | Feeling anger towards the Cleaner | 2 |
| | Disengaging from the Cleaner | 2 |
| | Prior knowledge of the Cleaner | 2 |
| | Engaging with the Cleaner initially | 1 |
| Newcomer | Cursing and otherwise loudly expressing anger | 6 |
| | New to the mutual aid group | 2 |
| | Escalating the situation | 2 |
| | Occupation in security | 1 |
| | Regulating resources more closely | 2 |
| Residents | Arguing with the Cleaner | 3 |
| | Seeking information from the mutual aid group | 3 |
| | Contrasting the mutual aid group to the Cleaner | 1 |
| | Urgent need for resources | 1 |
| Between actors | Arguments between residents and Cleaner | 1 |
| | Shared anger between residents and Friend | 3 |
| Mutual Aid Group Members | Staying alert for news about the Cleaner | 3 |

## Appendix C

Codebook: Sandy's Codes

| Theme | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Where she was | Removed from the conflict with the Cleaner | 2 |
| | Working near the Newcomer | 1 |
| What she was doing and feeling | Empathizing with the Newcomer's anger | 4 |
| | Debating about interfering the Newcomer | 3 |
| | Observing Friend's behaviors closely | 3 |
| | Modeling after friends' actions | 6 |
| | Seeking information from Friend | 2 |
| | Staying present and flexible for the mutual aid group | 1 |
| | Feeling "a sense of camaraderie" with residents | 6 |
| | Feeling overwhelmed and stressed | 4 |
| | Feeling the urgency to inform residents of the Cleaner | 3 |
| | Associating security position with policing | 3 |
| | Uncertain if Newcomer should stay in the group | 2 |
| | Less uncomfortable around residents' anger | 3 |
| | Still wary around residents | 1 |
| Positioning | New to the mutual aid group | 5 |
| | Discomfort around angry people | 2 |
| | Preferrence for in-person activities | 2 |

## Appendix D

Codebook: Mutual Aid Group's Codes

| Theme | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Challenges within the Mutual Aid Aroup | Irregular and impromptu distribution schedules | 4 |
| | Internal tensions | 3 |
| | Limited resources | 1 |
| | Little standardization within small group | 5 |
| Mutual Aid Group Norms | "Protective of the space" | 1 |
| | Reciprocity and mutual trust | 5 |
| | "solidarity not charity" | 5 |
| | Prioritizing People of Color & elders | 3 |
| | Centering relationship-building | 9 |
| | "Humanizing interactions" | 2 |
| | "A sense of community" | 3 |
| | "not escalating situations" | 5 |
| | Loosely regulating resources | 5 |
| Other | Haven't had to "de-escalate" | 1 |

# Appendix E

Codebook: What Feels like Solidarity for Sandy

| | Code | Recent Experiences | Past Experiences | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Mutual Aid Group** | **Graduate Course** | **Partial Hospitalization Program** | **Teaching and Mentoring** |
| **What feels right** | Taking action beyond emoting anger | 4 | | | 1 |
| | Validating any feelings that arise | 1 | 1 | | |
| | "shouldn't be the most vocally upset person" | 1 | 1 | | |
| | "You're a guest here, be a guest" | 3 | | | 6 |
| | Affirming the need to express anger | 3 | | 2 | |
| | Building "humanzing" and respectful interactions | 1 | | | 4 |
| | Asking "who is this anger serving?" | 1 | | | |
| | Expressing that racism is unjust | | 1 | | |
| **What feels wrong** | The Newcomer's affect and actions | 10 | | | |
| | "taking up space" | 1 | | | 1 |
| | "self-serving" anger from White people | 6 | 2 | | |
| | Disproportionate anger to one's experiences | 3 | 6 | | |