RACE, SPACE, AND RESISTANCE IN AMERICA'S WHITEST BIG CITY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines how racism structures the lives and emotions of communities of color in Portland, Oregon. As the U.S. becomes more racially diverse, Portland remains the whitest U.S. city with a population over 500,000. It is also a site where African Americans, Latinxs, Indigenous groups, and Asian Americans have worked to build community despite the city's history of racial violence and exclusion. Even today, Portland is a magnet for white supremacist groups and right-wing militias. Simultaneously, the city is considered an oasis of liberal politics and a "bohemian millennial paradise". Drawing primarily from in-depth interviews with Portlanders of color I ask: how are these contradictory realities reconciled in the lives of everyday Portlanders? As a person of color, what does it feel like to live and work in the whitest big city in America?

Participant narratives demonstrate conceptual connections between racial structures and racialized emotions, as their emotions were deeply intertwined with Portland's demographics and historical legacies of white supremacy in the city, highlighting complex emotional dimensions of everyday racism. I also show how demographics and spatial inequalities, such as gentrification, structure racialized lived experiences. I coin the concept of *ambient racism* which describes how legacies of racism

are embedded in the social environment that racialized people emotionally contend with daily. The framework of ambient racism captures how various modes of racism (macro, micro, etc.) work together and manifest in the emotional worlds of racialized individuals. Even though Portland is considered a politically progressive city, the experiences and perspectives of racially marginalized groups disrupts popular notions about what it means for a place to be "progressive". I argue that understandings of racism must also incorporate modes of resistance and self-preservation to better understand the relationship between inequality and resistance in society.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Portland Black Panther Party History Tour group is standing at the corner of Martin

Luther King Boulevard and Cook Street in Northeast Portland. Approximately thirty people are

in attendance, and the majority are white. The tour guide, an elderly former Portland Black

Panther Party member, is showing us the previous site of the Portland Black Panther office,

which is now a food truck lot slotted in between luxury condominium apartments and office

buildings. He shares memories about how the Portland Black Panther Party organized and

administered community survival programs in that space between the late 1960's and early

1970's. In a nearby parking lot, a middle-aged Black woman gets out of her car and takes notice

of the group. She approached a white tour goer standing on the periphery of the group and asked:

"What is this?" The white woman tour-goer turned around, and responded: "Oh, it's the Black

Panther History Tour of Portland."

> Black woman: The what?
>
> White woman: You know, the Black Panther Party.
>
> Black woman: What is that about?
>
> White woman: [speaking in a hushed tone] Well, it's about Black history in Portland. Do
> you know the Black Panther Party? This man here is telling us about his time- [gets cut
> off]
>
> Black woman: I don't give a fuck. The police here in Portland stopped me seventeen
> times! What about me? They held guns to my head and I didn't do nothing! They tried to
> kill me. I almost died! All they could say to me after was I'm sorry. I'm 54 years old, I've
> live here all my life. I am an elder here now and they don't give a damn!

After this exchange, the white woman looked wide-eyed and petrified; yet, despite the

disruption, tour goers kept their attention on the tour guide and continued to listen intently. The

Black woman left the group and entered a nearby business. A few minutes later, she returned and stood at the group's periphery again, this time listening to what the tour guide was saying for about thirty seconds. He was telling the group about a court hearing he attended in 1969. The woman began shaking her head and said "It's never gonna stop, it's never gonna stop, it's never gonna stop. Racism in Portland is never gonna stop! It's never gonna stop." At this point, she was standing among tour goers, who looked visibly uncomfortable. The tour guide ignored her presence and continued speaking. Most tour goers turned their backs toward her; some shrugged uneasily and shared sideways glances with each other. She began to walk away from the group toward her car, repeating the phrase, "It's never gonna stop." Once she got into her car, she rolled down the window and shouted toward the group: "Racism in Portland is never gonna stop! Do you all hear me? You all can do what you want with your tour but racism in Portland is never gonna stop. I was almost killed by the Portland police!" Each time she yelled, her voice overpowered the voice of the tour guide. Rather than listen to what she had to say, most tour goers tried to move closer to the tour guide to better hear him. Some tour goers even cupped their ears to drown out her screams. She drove away, still shouting out her window toward the group, "Racism in Portland is never gonna stop."

This scenario captures the clashing of multiple racial realities that exist in Portland, Oregon. The optics of a majority white racial history tour group ignoring the live testimony of a longtime Black resident reflects the city's struggles to reckon with its racial past and present (Burke and Jeffries 2016). Rather than hear the woman's anger, tour goers dismissed her in favor of more palatable stories from the past. While Portland is known for its liberal "niceness", the perspectives of Black and people of color paint a more complicated picture. This dissertation

documents the lived experiences, emotions, and resistance strategies of Portlanders of color with a range of racial-ethnic identities.

As the U.S. becomes more heterogenous, Portland, Oregon remains the whitest U.S. city with a population over 500,000 (United States Bureau of the Census 2019). This is a result of Oregon's racist and exclusionary past, which has led some to claim the state was designed as a "white utopia" (Novak 2015). At the same time, Portland is known as a liberal stronghold and the city's image is often associated with hipsters, craft coffee, and picturesque, "Instagrammable" nature hikes. Popular media representations of Portland such as the television show "Portlandia" tout it as a progressive bohemian millennial paradise "where 20-somethings go to retire". In many ways, Portland reflects broader contradictions between progressive racial ideals and racial realities. Ideals of diversity, inclusion, and progress exist alongside the city's historical legacy of structural inequalities and white supremacy (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Gibson 2007). Protests for racial justice in Portland and the deployment of federal law enforcement agents to "quell" demonstrations have also thrust the city into the national spotlight, making it a key site of contemporary racial tension and state violence in 2020 (Kravarik and Sidner 2020).

Oregon's Black exclusion laws, the elimination and removal of Native peoples, and a strong white supremacist presence means Portland's current racial demographics are no accident. In 2019, whites made up 77 percent of the population in Portland, while Black people comprised 5.8 percent, Latinxs 9.7 percent, Asians 8 percent, American Indians and Alaska Natives 0.7 percent, and Natives Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up 0.7 percent (United States Bureau of the Census 2019). This means Portland has the highest proportion of whites among U.S. cities with populations over 500,000.

This dissertation addresses Portland's contradictions by asking: how are these contradictory realities reconciled in the lives of Portlanders of color? As a person of color, what does it feel like to live and work in the whitest big city in America? What does it mean for a place to *feel* racist? How do racially marginalized groups resist racism in predominantly white spaces? To answer these questions, I draw from interviews with 49 Portlanders of color with a range of ethnic identities. This study utilizes an empirical critical race approach (Christian, Seamster, and Ray 2019: 1735) which "draws on stories that center the life experiences and voices of communities of color, to both challenge racism and validate its reality". Examining the emotions, lived experiences, and perspectives of people of color who have frequent contact with whites can show us how racial inequality persists in politically liberal cities and white spaces. While there is general social scientific consensus that racism has emotional consequences, few studies document how racial structures saturate the emotional worlds of racialized people. This project demonstrates how history, place, and social structure come alive in the everyday experiences and emotions of racially marginalized groups.

Portland and the Racialization of Space

The relationship between history, place, and space are key to understanding how participants' lived experiences are anchored in particular regional dynamics. Foucault (1984: 240) reminds us, "space is fundamental to any exercise of power". Understanding the production of space as a racial project requires an analytic lens that views physical space as "intricately interconnected with the extension of racial categories to space for the purposes of distributing resources along racial lines," (Liévanos 2019: 4). This conception of race and space allows us to see that the material outcomes and lived experiences in a particular place are mediated by the

production of space, or a physical "materialization of social being" (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 101).

However, place and space are distinct from one another. While place-level demographics

characterize regional contexts, spatial relations consider the location of particular phenomena in

relation to others (Logan 2012).

The enduring power of racialized social systems are integral to the formation of space

and place, as white urban regimes enshrine white interests, norms, and power into urban spaces

(Seamster 2015). White spaces are defined by an overwhelming presence of white people, where

Black and other people of color must carefully navigate the institutional, interpersonal, and

emotional dynamics that coincide with pervasive whiteness (Anderson 2015). While racial

inequality endures in majority white and racially diverse spaces (Burke 2012; Mayorga-Gallo

2014), this dissertation shows how nonwhite Portlanders' experiences were deeply entrenched in

the particularities of Portland's regional racial formation as a white metropolis (Cheng 2013).

Regional racial formations account for specific regional dynamics and everyday landscapes as

"crucial terrains through which racial hierarchies are learned, instantiated, and transformed"

(Cheng 2013: 3). Because ambient racism harnesses its power from the historical production of

regional racial formations, participant narratives highlight the power of place, emotions, and

resistance in shaping racialized lived experiences.

First, however, we need some background on the place in question. In many ways, the

history of Portland and the state of Oregon is a history of anti-blackness. In 1857, Oregon

adopted a state constitution banning Black people from entering, residing, or holding property in

the state. Indeed, Oregon was the only state in the union to include anti-Black exclusion laws

into its constitution. Black people who did not obey these laws were subject to forty lashes for

every six months they remained. It was not until 1926, that Black people were allowed to live in

the state (Brooks 2005). Oregon's intentional design as a white state fueled a cycle: whites who were looking to leave the South after the end of the Civil War flocked to Oregon, which portrayed itself as a pristine utopia with plentiful land and little racial heterogeneity. As such, The Oregon Trail established a direct route the Pacific Northwest, while the Oregon Donation Land Act granted free land to white settlers willing to move there. The arrival of white settlers resulted in the systematic elimination and erasure of Indigenous communities in Oregon through state-sanctioned violence, widespread disease, and land dispossession (Gibson 2007). Those who survived were forcibly relocated to reservations east of the Cascades (Lewis 2014). Despite a purported effort to negotiate land treaties with tribes such as the Kalapuya, Siletz, the Klamath, and more, these agreements were never ratified by the U.S. government, resulting in enormous life, land, and resource loss for tribal nations (Hansen 2005).

In addition to its settler colonial and anti-Black roots, Portland and the state of Oregon have an explicit history of anti-Asian discrimination. Alongside other west coast regions in the 19th century, rampant anti-Chinese sentiment forbade Chinese immigrants from holding real estate or mining claims in Oregon, and forced them to live in segregated enclaves near the west bank of the Willamette River (Wong 2004). By the 1880s, mobs of angry white Oregonians were participating in "anti-coolie" riots and enacting violence against Chinese laborers, after the state's Chinese population grew rapidly and a nationwide economic downturn caused widespread unemployment (Brooks 2004; Wong 2004). In 1927, a state constitutional amendment prohibited those deemed "Chinamen, Negroes, and Mulattos" from voting in the state (Brooks 2004). This language, along with racial housing covenants and anti-miscegenation legislation were not eradicated from the Oregon state constitution until decades later.

New Deal-era redlining and subsequent bulldozing of Black neighborhoods to make way for highways, a hospital, and urban renewal has given Portland a poor reputation when it comes to urban development (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Stroud 1999). During World War II, abundant jobs in the shipyards drew African Americans to the Portland area (Gibson 2007). Most workers lived in the city of Vanport- a segregated housing development just outside the Portland city limits. When the war ended, the Housing Authority of Portland deemed Vanport "troublesome" and "blighted", hinting at plans to dismantle it. However, in 1948, a major flood in the Columbia River destroyed Vanport, killing at least fifteen people and displacing more than two-thousand families- many of whom were Black (Gibson 2007). The Portland Housing Authority did little to support displaced residents, and most African Americans who opted to stay in the area moved to a segregated enclave in Northeast Portland called Albina, which became a hub of Black culture and community in Portland.

Once deemed a ghetto, today Albina and its constituent neighborhoods are ground-zero for gentrification in Portland. This part of the city is more known its craft coffee, trendy shops, and yoga studios than its Black history. Gentrification poses new problems for low-income, Black, and communities of color in Portland who are materially burdened by urban renewal in a city that purportedly values "inclusive neighborhoods" (Portland Office of Community and Civic Life 2019). The Albina district saw its proportion of Black residents drop from 41 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2017 after years of disinvestment and subsequent renewal (Gibson 2007). Although government entities have acknowledged their role in these losses, recent reports suggest that Portland's infrastructure planning still systematically overlooks the needs of low-income and Portlanders of color (Coalition of Communities of Color 2010; Hoffman 2016; Liévanos, Lubitow, and McGee 2019).

Portland and the state of Oregon's racial history is entrenched in the state's ties to white supremacist groups. Throughout the early twentieth century, Oregon had the highest per capita Ku Klux Klan membership in the country and the group forged relationships with political leaders in the state (Horowitz 1999). In 1922, Walter Pierce was elected governor of Oregon with active support from the Klan. Pierce was a paradoxical political character who advocated for progressive reform while also enacting nativist legislation using the Klan's endorsements (McCoy 2009). George Luis Bake- Portland's mayor from 1912 to 1932- was publicly photographed with Klan members, the Portland chief of police, and other civic leaders at a municipal planning meeting in 1921 (Oregon Historical Society 2020). Casual alliances between Oregon's political leaders and white supremacists both reflected and reproduced the state's overwhelmingly white majority.

Since the 1980's, Portland's racial homogeneity has attracted white supremacists to the region, making it an active ground for recruitment. Some white nationalists are drawn to the area by the "Northwest Territorial Imperative", which lays claim to the overwhelmingly white states of Oregon, Washington, Montana and Idaho as a separatist utopian territory for the "white race" (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000). It is thus not surprising that a slew of high profile hate crimes have taken place in Portland. In 1988, Ethiopian immigrant, Mulugeta Seraw was beaten to death by a group of white supremacist skinheads outside his apartment complex. More recently in 2017, Jeremy Christian- a white nationalist- fatally stabbed two people and injured a third after he was confronted for yelling racist slurs at two African American girls on the MAX train. These tragic events and many others put communities of color on edge in Portland.

Although the racial realities of Portland and the state of Oregon paint a grim picture, Black, Indigenous, communities of color are not passive victims. The Portland metropolitan area

is home to some of the most racially diverse communities in the state of Oregon and remains a site of Black, Indigenous, Asian American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander resistance. In the 1960's and 70's, Portland was home to an active Black Panther party chapter, which implemented survival programs throughout the city (Burke and Jeffries 2016). Black and Indigenous Portlanders continue to advocate for reparations to address land and property loss, displacement, and disparities in education (Ellis 2020; Powell 2021; Nguyen 2018). Likewise, Latinx migrant workers actively pursue labor rights and protection from deportation within Oregon's agricultural and food processing industries (Stephen 2001). More recently, the Black Lives Matter Movement spurred months long uprisings against systemic racism and police violence, which catapulted the city into the national spotlight. Alongside these larger concerted efforts, resistance takes place in everyday interactions, community-building, and the cultivation of personal empowerment despite the region's dark racial history and its contemporary implications. This dissertation accounts for the particularities of Portland's history and regional racial formation, which shape contemporary lived experiences of racially marginalized Portlanders today.

Racism and Postracialism

Macro-level theories of race and racism help us understand the overarching structural contexts in which the everyday experiences of racialized people take place. Omi and Winant's (2015) theory of racial formation locates discursive and ideological representations of race within their structural contexts. Racial formation is the "sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (109). For Omi and Winant, race is neither "natural" nor a mere illusion; instead race is a social construction that is made real through social relationships and power relations. Current conceptualizations of the racialized

social system posit that racial ideologies and structures are foundational to the organization of society, which shapes life chances for nonwhites (Bonilla-Silva 1997). As such, racism need not be reduced to ideology, acts of discrimination, or their psychological consequences, rather, they ought to be understood in relation to "the totality of racialized social relations and practices that constitute the racial structure of a society" (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 470). In a racialized social system, racism-in its ideological and structural forms- is foundational to the organization of our social system, which shapes life chances and everyday experiences of nonwhites

Theories of systemic racism give primacy to the history of the United States as a slaveholding nation that has facilitated the unjust enrichment of whites at the expense of people of color- particularly African Americans (Feagin 2006). Feagin's theory of systemic racism identifies whites as the central propagators of systems of discrimination that endure across time (it is thus, difficult to "transform or destroy"). Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations connect macro, micro, and meso-level processes, situating organizations as adaptive racial structures that link schemas with resources. Other scholars have pointed out the dialectical relationship between racial structures and ideologies (Golash-Boza 2016), while Jung's (2015) definition of racial structure encompasses varying scales of racism, schemas, and resources that adapt to changing times. Similarly Combs' (2019) "bodies out of place" framework highlights how racism operates "not on a continuum between structural and individual level but on an interconnected loop." (18). The concept of "ambient digital racism" has been explored by media studies scholars to describe how everyday "acceptable" race discourse has surprising similarities with explicit white supremacist language on online platforms (Siapera 2019). This conceptualization blurs the boundaries between overt white supremacy and everyday banal race talk. I extend the concept of ambient racism beyond the discursive realm by examining how it

operates across multiple aspects of everyday life for communities of color in a specific regional context. Conceptualizations of racism are not complete without also considering how gender, class, sexuality, and other axes of power intersect with race to shape people's life chances and lived experiences (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1991). All of the above frameworks for understanding contemporary racism reveal how racial inequality is created and reproduced in the so called "postracial" era. Emerging literature on whiteness, colorblind racism, and critical diversity scholarship helps explain how racism persists, even in seemingly progressive contexts.

Today, whites are likelier to indicate support for integrated neighborhoods, interracial marriage, and electing a Black president than they were 25 years ago (Smith et al. 2014). Despite whites' increasing support for racial ideals, structural inequalities between whites and nonwhites persist in the form of racial wealth disparities (Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Pew Research Center 2017), residential segregation (Lichter et al. 2015; Massey and Denton 1993), and unprecedented rates of incarceration among Blacks and Latinos (Alexander 2011). There is also evidence that white racial attitudes and preferred structural conditions do not match up. The "principle-policy gap" refers to an observed disconnect between whites' support of racial ideals such as equality and diversity and lack of support for redistributive policies such as busing and affirmative action (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Henry and Sears 2002; Schuman et al. 1997; Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017; Tuch and Hughes 2011). This mismatch reveals a paradox that is central to *postracialism*.

The idea that we live in a postracial society stems from the belief that racism is no longer a cause of inequality after overt forms of racial discrimination were outlawed following the Civil Rights Movement. A postracial view of the present considers civil rights protections, the election of a Black president, and the decline of overtly racist attitudes as signs that the U.S. is no longer an explicitly racist society (Berrey 2015; Crenshaw 2011; Haney-Lopez 2010; Omi and Winant

2015). Haney-Lopez (2010) defines postracial racism as "the various practices that collectively operate to maintain racial hierarchy even in the face of a broad social repudiation of purposeful racial mistreatment." (1027)**.** Postracialism is largely upheld by colorblind ideology- a discursive tool used by whites "to explain contemporary inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (Bonilla-Silva 2003:2). Colorblind ideology can be understood through four key frames (74): "Abstract liberalism" suggests that life chances are due to individual actions, meaning that upward mobility and economic success are solely due to hard work, not racial privilege, and actions to correct racial inequality discriminate against whites. "Naturalization" suggests that racialized outcomes, such as preferences for white partners or living in racially segregated neighborhoods, have nothing to do with race, but are rather, a result of "natural" inclinations toward likeness. "Cultural racism" indicates that unequal racial outcomes are due to deficient cultures (e.g., black people are lazy). "Minimization" suggests that racism does not substantially affect the life chances people of color anymore. By not distinguishing between interpersonal and institutional racism, the latter of which grants whites enormous symbolic, political, social, and economic advantages, whites overlook the ways racism is built into the fabric of US society. Colorblindness has also become embedded in the institutional workings of U.S. society, concealing the racial causes and consequences of inequality (Alexander 2011; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Lewis 2003). While colorblindness remains a dominant racial ideology that claims to overlook racial difference, the emergence of diversity ideology purports to celebrate racial representation in organizations, institutions, and communities.

The concept of diversity ideology was first introduced by David Embrick (2011), who observed a contradiction between public statements about diversity and patterns of gender and racial inequality in U.S. corporate workplaces. He defines diversity ideology as a set of beliefs

held by many individuals in U.S. society that women and minorities are not only treated equally in comparison to their white male counterparts, but that institutions such as major U.S. businesses are sincerely invested with creating a racially and gender diverse workplace. (542)

Emerging critical diversity literature engages the concept of diversity ideology, showing how purportedly progressive individuals, institutions, organizations, and communities across various contexts uphold diversity as a stated value while doing little to acknowledge or relieve ongoing patterns of inequality in these settings (Berrey 2015; Burke 2012; Mayorga- Gallo 2014; Muro 2016; Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017; Ward 2008; Warikoo 2016). Diversity may be advocated by individual whites in principle, but policies and practices that redistribute resources to ameliorate racial inequalities are less likely to be supported by whites (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2003; DiTomaso 2013; Warikoo 2016). Berrey (2015) argued that diversity emerged to neutralize the conflict between goals of affirmative action and affirmative action backlash. The softer framing of diversity was palatable to wider publics because it articulated diversity as a value and practice that benefits everyone, including whites. This suggests that whiteness is central to diversity ideology: diversity exists for whites, not racialized groups (Ahmed 2012; Berrey 2015; Ward 2008).

Whites who live in multiracial neighborhoods claim to value the diversity that surrounds them but live their lives according to a "white habitus," a socialization process predicated upon racial segregation, white norms, and the preservation of material resources among white social networks (Bonilla-Silva, Embrick, and Goar 2006; Burke 2012; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). However, the desire for diversity has its limits. Hwang and Sampson (2014) found that whites who move into gentrifying neighborhoods prefer residential racial diversity up to certain point; their study demonstrates that gentrification trajectories associated with white in-movement decrease when

the share of Blacks in a neighborhood is forty percent or higher. Relatedly, Woody (2018) found that white parents who enrolled their children in a diverse Spanish immersion school program prefer carefully controlled diversity- one that benefits whites without threatening race and class hierarchies. Macro-level theories of contemporary racism, colorblindness, and diversity ideology demonstrate how even purportedly progressive white spaces may reproduce multiple forms of racism that manifest in the everyday experiences of people of color. However, questions remain about how macro, meso, and micro forms of racism work together to make racism salient in the everyday lives of racially minoritized groups.

Everyday Racism and Emotions

The everyday experiences of people of color are inseparable from historical contexts of discrimination. Micro-level experiences of racism, or *everyday racism*, reveal connections between structural forces and routine situations in everyday life (Essed 1991). By documenting accounts of anti-Black racism, Essed shows how everyday racism is not experienced randomly; it emerges from racial histories and social structures that animate everyday interactions, feelings, and outcomes. Building upon this, Feagin (2006) argues that "The systemic character of contemporary racism constantly reveals itself in these everyday accounts of life in the United States" (193). Everyday racism experienced by middle class people of color invoke harm despite class privilege and assimilation (Feagin 1991; Feagin and Cobas 2015; Pattillo 1999; Ray 2017; Vallejo 2012). In his study of Black middle-class experiences, Feagin (1991) shows how the additive effects of discrimination in public places invoke a cumulative burden on Black Americans regardless of their class and professional standing. Similarly, Ray (2017) documents how Black men and women who live in majority white middle class neighborhoods moderated

14

their outdoor activities and movement through public space to avoid gendered forms of racism. Upwardly mobile middle-class Blacks and Latinos also navigate multiple forms of racism as they navigate their respective middle-class communities and professional roles (Feagin and Cobas 2013; Pattillo 1999; Vallejo 2012). Despite their status as model minorities, Asian Americans experience racial violence that stems from their historical racialization as economic threats, sexualized subjects, and invasive foreigners (Lee 2021). While these studies illuminate how racism manifests in the lives of people of color, few have focused on the explicit emotional dimensions of everyday racism among multiple racial-ethnic groups.

Emotions have been central to race scholarship even when they are not explicitly articulated as the focus of analysis. Early foundational statements like Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 2007) articulate African Americans' experience of "double consciousness"- a fractured sense of identity that derives from constantly viewing oneself through the eyes of the white world. Du Bois' concepts of *the veil* and *the color line* refer to the ways historical oppression has rendered the humanity of Blacks invisible to the white world. Similarly, Frantz Fanon (1952) understood the psychological impact of racism and colonialism as a process of internalizing the viewpoint of the oppressor. Through the mechanism of white racism, Black and colonized people may end up emulating their oppressors. These processes may also result in intergenerational racial trauma, including chronic emotional pain, low-self esteem, and malaise (hooks 2004). Du Bois, Fanon, hooks, and other Black scholars convey how social structures become internalized, revealing how racism shapes the social-psychological orientations of racialized groups.

Emotions are not just a psychological response to external stimuli, but deeply tied to the social structures and power relations that surround us. By centering the lived experiences of

people of color, contemporary research highlights emotional responses to racialization and institutional discrimination (Ferguson 2000; Lee and Zhou 2014; Maghbouleh 2017; Moore 2008; Romero 2011; Shedd 2015; Trieu and Lee 2017). While not framed through the lens of racialized emotions, Ferguson (2000) conceptualizes fear felt by Black boys in public school as a "social terror that arises out of a group condition" (116). Lee and Zhou (2014) found that Chinese and Vietnamese American college students in Orange County, California internalized aspects of the model minority myth, which led to poor mental health for those who did not meet narrow definitions of success relative to their high-achieving co-ethnics. Additional research focuses on microaggressions- seemingly subtle racialized interactions that elicit cumulative emotional wounds (Pierce 1995; Solorzano et al. 2009; Sue 2010). Smith and co-authors (2006) define microaggressions as "subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed at people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (300). Microaggresisons may also be based on one's gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname (Sue 2010). Incessant racial microaggressions cause unnecessary stress to people of color while privileging whites, which has implications for race-related stress (Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano 2006).). In response to microaggressions and racialization, individuals may deploy strategies such as emotional resistance (Vasquez-Tokos and Norton-Smith 2016) micro-resistance (Evans and Moore 2015), and racial checking (Eschmann 2020) in order to leverage agency and restore a sense of group worth. While the literature on microaggressions captures their social-psychological effects and corresponding resistance strategies, questions remain about how structural forces animate these micro-level exchanges.

Previous work that explicitly grapples with race and emotions addresses how racialized individuals emotionally respond and cope with racism and other forms of structural vulnerability

such as undocumented status (Vaquera, Aranda, and Sousa-Rodriguez 2017), controlling images (Collins 1990; Vasquez-Tokos and Norton-Smith 2016) and everyday stigmatization (Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012). Coined by Arlie Hochschild in 1979, the concept of emotional labor refers to the ways in which individuals strategically manage their emotions and emotional expressions in adherence to "feeling rules" in commercial work environments. Feeling rules are emotional norms that prescribe the expression of certain emotions in a given situation (Hochschild 1979). Some have studied the ways in which gendered, racialized, and class hierarchies shape feeling rules in particular environments (Evans and Moore 2015; Harlow 2003; Kang 2003; Pierce 1995; Wingfield 2010; 2019; Wingfield and Alston 2014). In predominantly white workplaces and organizations, people of color (especially women) may be expected to perform a range of racialized and gendered emotional labor that is not expected of their white (and often male) peers (Evans and Moore 2015; Kang 2003; Lerma, Hamilton, and Nielsen 2019; Wingfield 2010; 2019). Power dynamics within predominantly white spaces require racially subordinated individuals to "manage the self" in order to diffuse racial conflict, cope with stigmatization, and construct a pleasant exterior in adherence to "racialized feeling rules" (Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012; Wingfield 2010; 2019).

Despite the rich array of research that addresses intersections of race, emotions, and labor, there is relatively little theorization and about the relationship between racial structure and emotions. In his 2018 American Sociological Association presidential address, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva urged sociologists to "take emotions seriously". Bonilla-Silva argues that emotions ought to concern structuralists, as they have materiality and are inextricable from the racialized production of space. In response to Bonilla-Silva's call, this dissertation draws connections between emotions and social structure by providing empirical evidence that demonstrates how

structural racism manifests in the emotions and minutiae of everyday life for racialized

individuals in a predominantly white urban context.

Sample and Research Methodology

This qualitative study is primarily interview-based, and draws from 49 in-depth, semi

structured interviews with Black, Latinx, Asian American, Indigenous and multiracial

Portlanders with a range of ethnic identities. Interview questions probed about participant

residential history, interracial interactions, experiences at work, school, and in public places, as

well as Portland's reputation and livability as a city. I also conducted approximately 15 hours of

ethnographic participant observation at community events such as the Portland Black Panther

History Tour and POC-oriented community organization meetings and events.

To qualify for an interview, participants must be 18 years of age, identify as Black,

Indigenous, or a person of color, and lived in Portland, Oregon for at least one year. About one-

third of participants were recruited through personal connections and subsequent snowball

sampling. I utilized several personal connections (gatekeepers) who connected me with Portland

residents who met my sampling criteria; some of these participants then put me in contact with

eligible friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, which helped facilitate snowball sampling. The

majority of participants were recruited using online recruitment ads. I posted recruitment ads on

several "Portland POC" Facebook groups and circulated the ad on Twitter. After interested and

eligible individuals contacted me via Facebook Message, Twitter, or email in response to the ads,

I provided additional background about myself and the research project and asked if they would

be interested in doing an in-person, phone, or Skype interview and if so, where they would like

to meet or when would be an appropriate time to speak. 31 interviews took place in-person and

17 took place over the phone or Skype. In-person interviews took place in settings such as coffee

shops, libraries, universities, participants' workplace offices, and the co-working space I had access to during my field work.

The data include interviewees that range in age from 19 to 49-years-old. The average age among participants was 32. 27% of participants identified as Latinx, 29% identified as Black, 35% identified as Asian American, 6% identified as multiracial, 2% Native/American Indian, and 2% Pacific Islander. Ethnic identities ranged from Mexican, Columbian, Salvadoran, African, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Iranian, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, Chinook, and Tibetan. Most respondents were U.S.-born (77%). Sample racial demographics were generally reflective of the racial demographic distribution of nonwhites in Portland. 52% of respondents were transplants who moved to Portland from cities outside of Oregon, while 48% were born and raised in either Portland or the state of Oregon.

The majority of this sample is middle class, measured by individual income, level of education, and occupation. All 49 participants had at least a high school degree or GED. 20% had some college education or were in the process of completing their bachelor's degree. 42% percent held a bachelor's degree, 32% held a master's degree, and 5% held a doctorate degree. Approximately one-third of participants made an individual annual income below $30,000. Nearly one-third made between $30,000 and $60,000, one-third made between $60,000 and $90,000, while the few remaining participants made more than $250,000 per year. 12% of respondents held blue-collar or service jobs, and a vast majority (77%) held white-collar, professional or public service jobs. 10% were students. All spoke fluent English and many worked in professional environments where they had frequent contact with whites. Given that all participants had some level of college education, most had access to language, academic

knowledge, and forms of cultural capital that informed the ways they spoke about race. Thus, my findings reflect class-specific experiences with race and racism.

35 participants identified as women, 13 participants identified as men, and 1 identified as nonbinary. Given that women were overrepresented in the sample due to their greater likelihood of responding to recruitment ads and inquiries, it is important to note participants' racialized lived experiences highlighted in this study are inextricable from gender oppression and other structural vulnerabilities experienced by women of color (Crenshaw 199; Collins 2015).

Because the majority of this sample consists of formally educated people of color, it is not generally representative of "people of color" in Portland, but nonetheless presents a compelling case study that demonstrates how history, demographics, and place animate the emotions of individuals I spoke to. Additionally, my use of the term "people of color" includes participants with a wide range of racial-ethnic identities and experiences. This phrasing is not intended to conflate distinct experiences of anti-blackness, settler colonial erasure, unique forms of racialization, or downplay the ways racialization is also contingent upon gender, sexuality, skin color, socioeconomic status and other axes of privilege and oppression. Instead, in this dissertation I focus on shared experiences among all people of color I interviewed in order to highlight commonalities in relation to broader systems of white domination.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. During each interview, I used an interview guide that targeted four main themes: 1) Residential history and neighborhood experiences, 2) Experiences in public space, 3) Work, school, and community, and 4) Resistance, self-care, self-preservation. Questions included "What were your first impressions of Portland when you moved here?" (for transplants) "How would you describe your neighborhood?" "As a person of color, what are your experiences like in public spaces such as restaurants or public

transport?" "Could you describe the racial dynamics in your workplace?" "Do you feel like you

have a community in Portland?" "As a city, what kind of reputation do you think Portland has?"

"What are some things you do to take care of yourself?" "What makes you feel in community?"

Aside from asking planned questions in my interview guide, I also tracked "markers": vague or

passing references made by respondents that signify potentially important topics to probe and

explore further (Weiss 1995). For example, one participant said that she felt like she was in

"defense mode" all the time while in public places in Portland. I "marked" "defense mode" and

utilized this to ask unplanned probing questions about what she meant by being in defense mode

and what it entails. This strategy helped elicit depth, detail, and clarification from participants.

Perceptions about race and other embodied characteristics shape the interview process

and may influence how respondents discuss racial matters (Gallagher 2003; Vasquez-Tokos

2017). Because I am a light-skinned, multiracial person with Southeast Asian and white

European ancestry, with a European surname, my racial ambiguity could have muddled

respondents' perceptions of me, but in most interviews, I disclosed my racial-ethnic identity. In

most cases, this seemed to make respondents feel more comfortable. Most shared candid stories

with me about experiences with racism and white people, which signaled rapport and implies

that nonwhite respondents likely did not associate me with the "white ethnographic gaze"

(Young 2008).

Interview transcripts were analyzed in ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program. I

created all codes during analysis rather than at the beginning of the study. I understand coding as

a transitional process between data collection and data analysis, much like a "bridge" that

connects raw data to written analysis (Saldaña 2016). I began by open coding, in which I closely

coded interview transcripts by "letting the data lead" (Charmaz 2014). When patterns emerged, I

then began focused coding in which I applied codes that I developed during open coding. Focused codes were informed by my critical race approach and originating research questions about Portlanders' experiences with racism and resistance strategies. Some of the most frequent and significant focused codes were "Emotional toll of racism" "Microaggressions" "Leveraging Privilege" "Importance of Place/Space" "Liberal Racism" "Importance of Community" and "Empowerment". Frequently used focused codes informed the bases for major conceptual themes highlighted in this dissertation such as ambient racism, racialized emotions, and resistance. Themes were conceptualized through analytic memos: brief write-ups that communicate early articulation of concepts, themes, or findings that emerge from qualitative data (Saldaña 2016). Memo-writing allowed me to condense large amounts of qualitative data into the most important findings, themes, and patterns that emerged from the data. It also helped me attribute focused codes and subcodes to each major theme in order to conceptually organize my data and review raw data connected to each theme in preparation for reporting and written analysis. This way, I could select interview quotes that I thought best represented major themes.

The findings in this dissertation draw from interviews and ethnographic observations that were conducted between June 2019 and March 2020 before the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., which limited my ability to carry out ethnographic data collection after this point. It is also important to note that data collection took place prior to protests against systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and police brutality within Portland and across the U.S in 2020. While interviews do not capture how participants understood these specific events, many of the racial problems highlighted in this dissertation- including Portland's racist history- took the national spotlight when Portland became ground-zero for uprisings in response to the murder of George Floyd and systemic racism. Thus, the data presented here do not document the tumult of summer

2020, but the narratives of participants about racism in Portland make up part of the larger backdrop in which these events took place.

Scope of the Study

This study reveals the centrality of emotions in experiences of everyday racism, linking demographics, place, and social structures to racialized lived experiences. My analysis demonstrates how everyday racial oppression and corresponding modes of resistance emerge from historical processes and regional racial structures. These findings complicate dichotomies of structural and individual racism, demonstrating how social structures do not only produce patterns of inequality, but also permeate the emotions of racialized people. Participant narratives show how the perspectives of racially marginalized groups puncture the city's image as a liberal utopia. Various modes of resistance and self-preservation correspond to the multiple dimensions of racism and other forms of oppression in participants' lives.

Chapter II places analytical focus on emotions that coincide with everyday racism. I document what living in a predominantly white big city *feels* like for people of color and introduce the concept of *ambient racism* which describes how legacies of racism are "baked into" the social environment that racialized people emotionally contend with daily. I developed this concept to describe the ways in which participants understood racism as more than "just" a temporary feeling, but constituted by the full sum of various modes of racism. Despite the material realities of racism and pervasive whiteness in Portland, some participants questioned their own perceptions of reality because they felt there was little evidence to "prove" that their emotional discomfort could be attributed to troubling racial dynamics in their environment. This exacerbated a process called racial gaslighting: the political, social, economic and cultural

23

process that pathologizes those who resist or question the racial status quo (Davis and Ernst 2019). Although the term gaslighting has been used to describe abusive interpersonal relationship dynamics, I build upon its sociological utility by applying it to the emotional and mental health dimensions of racialized lived experiences.

Chapter III highlights participants' concrete experiences with overt and covert racism. I capture how racially marginalized groups understand Portland's racial contradictions, including the city's ties to overt white supremacy and simultaneous reputation for liberal friendliness. Participants' experiences were peppered with individual acts of bigotry, combined with microaggressions, and other forms of covert racism. Because the threat of white supremacist violence in the city looms over everyday life, one participant described Portland as the "Progressive Jim Crow South", which may sound counterintuitive, but in fact captures complex racial dynamics in Portland. This chapter highlights how seemingly progressive spaces may replicate patterns of racial violence and inequalities.

While the first two empirical chapters address manifestations of racial oppression in the lives of Portlanders of color, Chapter IV focuses on resistance. This chapter demonstrates how middle class people of color use aspects of their occupational privilege to divert material resources in ways that alleviate structural inequalities. The power of community-building and intentional cultivation of spaces free from racial violence were also important practices that helped participants maintain their emotional well-being. I show how resistance takes place on a spectrum of action, ranging from attempts to alleviate structural inequalities through economic cooperation, community building, personal empowerment and a politics of refusal. By refusing to internalize dominant narratives about their socially situated identities, participants protected their mental health.

CHAPTER II

EMOTIONS AND AMBIENT RACISM

"Much like class and gender, race cannot come to life without being infused with emotions, thus, racialized actors feel the emotional weight of their categorical location." (Bonilla-Silva 2019: 2)

"We are all part of this, but racism to me is a white problem that black and brown people pay for, and you get to a point where you're tired of paying. I'm tired of paying. What I'm talking about here is the psychological pay. Like the payment of my mind and my spirit which has changed and ulcered. I need to find a way to assist my community and keep my own peace of mind here, or what's left of it. Portland is also a beautiful place. You have a place that is almost 90 percent independently owned businesses. We're two hours from oceans, mountains, and desert. As a society we can figure out how to put people on the moon, but we have not figured out race? So my platform is, how in the fuck do we figure this out?" -Alex (49, Black, woman)

Emotions are a window into the ways social structures shape lived experiences. They help us make sense of the present, the past, and the places we inhabit. In his seminal text, *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois asks: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (1903:7). Reflecting upon his childhood experiences in the opening chapter, Du Bois demonstrates that the emotional realities of race are *felt* long before they are understood as a social phenomenon. Emotions are not merely individual feelings, but are shaped by social structures that impact the well-being of racialized groups (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Kang 2003; Kim 2016; Wingfield 2010). This chapter examines the emotional dimensions of racism among Portlanders of color with a range of racial/ethnic identities. I identify commonalities across racial-ethnic group experiences and unravel *how* the emotional dimensions of race are connected to place, including their demographic, political, and cultural contexts.

Emotions were central to the ways participants understood their racialized lived experiences in Portland. Even though the racial dynamics of Portland are reflective of national

racial formations (Omi and Winant 2015), many participants attributed their emotions to the demographic, cultural, and political contexts that they felt were unique to the city. While participants' experiences varied, most, to some degree, reported feelings of isolation and fear stemming from overwhelmingly white demographics and the cultural, political landscape of Portland. These emotional dynamics were especially salient among transplants who moved to Portland from more racially diverse places.

The omnipresence of white domination also required participants to take part in various forms of racialized emotional labor that include assessing risk, "reading rooms", and observing the demeanor and behaviors of dominant groups in order to safely participate in mundane activities like using public transport, interacting with co-workers, and going shopping. Many managed their impression in strategic ways to quell the potential anxieties of whites and build rapport in white-dominated settings.

Despite the material realities of race and racism in their lives, some Portlanders of color questioned their own interpretation of reality because they felt there was little tangible evidence to "prove" that their emotional struggles could be attributed to troubling racial dynamics in their environment. The covert nature of racism in seemingly progressive contexts like Portland exacerbated the process of racial gaslighting: the political, social, economic and cultural process that pathologizes those who resist or question the racial status quo (Davis and Ernst 2019; Sweet 2019). As a result, some respondents blamed themselves for their own struggles in Portland, contributing to further emotional discomfort.

Taken together, participant narratives reveal the centrality of emotions in the study of racialized lived experiences. *Emotions are not merely symptomatic of the racialized social system* (Bonilla-Silva 1997*), but an integral affective process through which structural racism*

operates. Racial structures imprint upon emotions and can determine how individuals internalize, respond to, contest, and uphold the racial order. Interview data suggest that racial experiences and emotions among Portlanders of color do not derive from any one individual, encounter, or identifiable source. Rather, I argue racial experiences are a reflection of *ambient racism:* subtly isolating and exclusionary characteristics that are "baked into" the culture, built environment, and daily interactions in (seemingly progressive) majority white contexts. Framed this way, racism does not only take the form of interactional mishaps such as microaggressions or implicit bias, nor can it be explained solely by macro-structural dynamics. Rather, the framework of *ambient racism* accounts for the ways macro-systems come to shape the micro-level feelings and experiences of people of color, encompassing the diffuse and cumulative effects of historical legacies of racism on local demographics and culture, as well as the physical and symbolic space that racial actors inhabit.

Participants conveyed their experiences through emotions precisely because the power of race permeates their lives at multiple levels simultaneously (structural, interactional, psychological) and cannot be neatly traced back to a particular person or situation. Race *feels* like an ambient phenomenon for racially subordinated groups because- as one participant, Michael put it- "it is in the air we breathe". While purely structural analyses may not address the power of racialized emotions, studies that examine interpersonal racial dynamics like microaggressions and individual discrimination, may overlook the deep, structural and place-based dynamics at play in micro-level interactions, behaviors, and emotions.

My use of the term "people of color" includes participants with a wide range of racial-ethnic identities and experiences. This turn of phrase is not intended to conflate the distinct experiences of anti-blackness, settler colonial erasure, and unique forms of racialization or

downplay the ways racialization is also contingent upon gender, sexuality, phenotypical traits, socioeconomic status and other axes of privilege and oppression. Instead, in this chapter I focus on shared experiences among all people of color I interviewed in order to highlight congruous experiences among people of color in relation to broader systems of white domination.

The Experiences of Transplants and Salience of Race

The experiences of Portland transplants were particularly telling about the distinction between participants' initial understandings of Portland's public image as a city and the realities of everyday life there as a person of color. Approximately 52 percent of the sample were transplants: individuals who were not born or raised in Portland but chose to move there as adults. I spoke with Portland transplants who have lived in the city ranging from 1 to 12 years. Many expressed that they did not do much research on the racial demographics of Portland or the history of Oregon before deciding to move there. Some understood Portland as a liberal-minded, friendly, and bohemian city, filled with natural beauty and unique amenities. A few were intrigued by the quirky depiction of the city they saw on the TV show, *Portlandia*. However, these understandings of place were complicated by experiences with racism, microaggressions, and pervasive whiteness. The salience of race in Portland is especially apparent in the narratives of transplants who were able to compare their experiences in Portland with more diverse places they have lived. Indeed, some participants who chose to move to Portland indicated that their positive first impressions of the city began to dissolve after coming to understand the salience of race and racism in a purportedly progressive place, which contributed to feelings of disappointment and disillusionment.

Alex, a 49-year-old Black-identified woman who was born and raised in Chicago, moved to Portland with her wife and child from Arizona where she had difficulties attaining legal guardianship of her child due to Arizona's restrictive same-sex family adoption laws. Alex and her wife's decision to move to Portland was primarily motivated by Oregon's progressive adoption laws for same-sex parents, alongside her positive association with the city and wife's family ties to the area:

> We came here from Arizona mainly because at the time Arizona's adoption laws for gay couples restricted my ability to adopt my own child. Oregon allows for same-sex parent adoption, so we really came here to make that process smoother [...] My wife's family also lives here so we have spent some time here in staggered amounts. And with those trips, all you see is the beauty. All you're seeing is the marketing. But upon moving here, and especially parenting a brown son with a white wife, what I didn't realize at the time when we were deciding to move, was how much being Black means in Oregon specifically.

Alex expressed that her visits to Portland aligned with what she later referred to as Portland's "excellent PR campaign", but soon realized after moving to the city that the politics of race within and outside her interracial family became difficult to ignore. Even though Portland is considered one of the most LGBTQ-friendly cities in the U.S. (Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index 2020), such measures of equality do not account for racial climate, making them poor indicators of inclusion for people like Alex and other LGBTQ people of color whose experiences are uniquely shaped by racism and other intersecting forms of oppression (Acosta 2013; Brooks 2020; Moore 2011). I asked Alex to expand upon what it means to be Black in Oregon, and how the importance of race in the majority white city of Portland came to inform her understanding of the city:

> So I recognize my economic level of privilege, and even with that here in a place like Portland, my blackness is othered because I'm not from here, and I was raised in Chicago where Black people are everywhere. Even with that privilege in terms of education, resources I have, my status in the community, the high levels of fuckery that go down just related to melanin alone is work. When people see me, they might think, "oh Alex is so

lucky, Alex is so fortunate" because I have education, good credit, all of those things that I was socialized to believe would, I think, separate me as an individual from the dysfunction of racism, or so I thought. That's a lie. My parents lied (laughs). I mean I know they didn't lie, but they instilled in me that if I could secure some economic privilege and play by those rules, I would be okay.

Alex realized that class privilege alone is not enough to shield her from interpersonal and institutionalized racism in Portland (Feagin 1991; Pattillo 1999). Living there made Alex feel disillusioned with the promise of upward mobility instilled by her working-class parents who raised her in Chicago- a city in which the share of African Americans is approximately the same as the share of non-Hispanic whites (United States Bureau of the Census 2013).

Barbara, a 49- year-old Japanese-American woman who moved to Portland from Los Angeles had an optimistic view of Portland that began to fade, noting "As a newcomer I certainly thought it's a hip, fun city with very liberal people in it. Yay, I love all that. But then after I got here I started to have small racial incidences and didn't see any Asians". Relatedly, Denise- a 42-year-old Black-identified multiracial woman who also moved to Portland from Los Angeles, described a romantic scene upon her first visit to the city:

> I fell in love with it. We drove in at night and there were the city lights, the bridge was up, and I remember we were caravanning in and I was trying to merge off of a highway ramp to follow my friends and someone slowed down to let me in. That moment was like "ahhhhh" that would never happen in LA. I was like, "you're all so nice" and then we kind of toured around the next day, it was a beautiful sunny day in December and everyone was so friendly and helpful and I loved it. I was a bit more naïve then.

Denise understood Portland as a visually beautiful city, filled with friendly people and accommodating drivers. She described Portland like a beacon of hope after several years living in Los Angeles where she felt frustrated with traffic, crowding, and what she described as the "superficial bubble" of working in the television industry. And yet, Denise felt she was being naïve at the time. When I asked how her perspective of Portland changed since that first visit, Denise responded:

I still think Portland is pretty friendly, but I think in the last few years especially I've been more on edge about race and racism. Perhaps some of that was connected to the election in 2016 but I do think it is true that people who already are racist feel more permission to be racist, such as that incident on the MAX a few years ago. When I think of the average white person in Portland I no longer think of these nice friendly gentle people. I think of the microaggression kind of white people, I also think of the overt racist people, I think of dangerous and violent white people. So I don't feel as comfortable here as I did at first. And the whiteness is overwhelming. I visited my friend in Cleveland not too long ago and there were Black people everywhere, I was like "wow there's another black person, and another black person!" (laughs). I was so happy to see Black people all over the place. So I just miss having that. Portland being a white city has become more difficult for me to contend with.

Denise's rose-tinted view of Portland waned as her race consciousness grew in response to events like the election of Donald Trump and the 2017 attack on MAX light rail train. Along with several other participants, Denise refers to the MAX incident as one moment that has come to shape their discomfort with being in public spaces in Portland. On May 26th, 2017, Jeremy Christian- a white nationalist- fatally stabbed two people and injured a third after he was confronted for yelling anti-Muslim, racist slurs at two teenage black girls traveling on the MAX. This disturbing event is one of many instances of documented racially motivated violence in Oregon (Horowitz 1999). Denise is not only weary of the presence of white nationalists, but also expresses that the sheer overwhelming white majority in Portland amplifies the significance of seeing other Black people in public when she visits more racially heterogenous cities. While the rarity of a sunny winter day in Portland may initially feel like a beacon of hope, the realities of everyday life as a person of color in the city may be a bit cloudier.

Some participants noted that they did little research on the demographic and historical context of Portland and Oregon before deciding to move there. Alicia, a 30-year-old Black woman who moved to Portland to work in the wine industry shared:

I didn't know much about it, I just knew there was a small wine industry, not as big as California. My understanding was that it would be a good place to be a newcomer because the wine community might be more connected. I don't think I really had

expectations because I'd never been to Oregon before. I didn't know anybody when I got here and I kind of just arrived sight unseen and I didn't do much research about the state or its history.

Like Denise, Alicia felt in retrospect that her decision-making process when moving to Oregon was naïve. It was not until she felt the emotional impact of being a racialized minority in the wine industry and in the city that she began to grapple with the salience of race in Portland, which was distinct from her early racial socialization in a predominantly Black middle-class community in Maryland:

> I didn't think too much about the fact that I might be the only person of color or how working in that industry would make me feel, or how being a woman in that industry would make me feel. I guess I was pretty naïve, and in some ways very oblivious to thinking about those things, because I grew up in a very middle-class, predominantly African American community on the East Coast, so I just never felt like a minority. I guess I never thought of myself that way so it was an experience I would say I was not mentally or emotionally prepared for.

Alicia also notes how the interplay of both race and gender shaped her experience as a Black woman working in a white and male dominated industry. While this demographic pattern is observed across the wine industry nationally, there is only one Black-owned winery out of 725 wineries in the state of Oregon. It is therefore not surprising that for Alicia, living in Portland and working in the Oregon wine industry is where she became truly familiarized with what it *feels* like to be a minority. Lara, a 22-year-old Colombian American woman who grew up in Miami, Florida, echoed similar sentiments:

> I always joke that I went from being part of the majority in Miami to really knowing what it's like to be the minority because everyone in Miami is Caribbean, Cuban, Black, Latino, we got everything. So that's what I thought normal life was, and then I came out here to Oregon and I was like "ohhh". This is what they mean when they say minority. So that was a culture shock for me and I didn't really know what I was signing up for.

Like other participants, Lara did not anticipate how Portland's racial demographics would shape her relationship to the city and every day, "normal" life. This speaks to the power of place and

racial demographics in constructing the lived experiences and sentiments of nonwhites in majority white urban settings like Portland.

Relatedly, Jen, a 23-year-old Korean American woman expressed feelings of regret about not doing background research on Portland before deciding to move there. While she praises the natural beauty of the city, Jen describes her feelings upon moving to Portland from Los Angeles:

> I first visited Portland once before and I thought it was really beautiful. That's something I'll never really argue with. Just in terms of natural beauty, Portland is amazing. I didn't look at the student body of the college before moving there, which was a huge mistake. I really regretted that. I think I was under the assumption that I'd be around other young people like myself from a variety of different places, and to some extent that was true but I think as I went through my program I became more and more disappointed because the school had a lot of white people and the city itself is also very white.[...] I'm not gonna lie, I was somewhat influenced by the show Portlandia, which I think is a great show. But obviously all the real things in Portland like the police brutality, the systemic racism, the houselessness. I really had no idea.

Jen distinguishes her early impression of the city from the "real" Portland, which she now understands as defined by overwhelming whiteness, institutionalized racism, and housing crises. Like Jen and others, Crystal, a 34-year-old Black woman originally from South Carolina moved to Portland for education and work opportunities. Being from the south, Crystal shared that she was used to being around other Black people most of the time, but had some experiences with whites from her schooling. While she did not necessarily have romanticized expectations about Portland, she had strange feelings upon moving there that were difficult for her to articulate:

> I guess I knew coming in that Portland is really rainy and really white, but I guess I didn't really know to what degree. Growing up, you know, I'm from the South so it's pretty Black and white. Being in honors classes growing up there you tend to be peppered in with whites, so I was like you know if it's like that I think I can handle it due to my schooling experience. But when I got here it was different. Um, how should I say it... it definitely feels different. I feel like there was something I couldn't quite understand when I first got here.

Crystal understood that Portland would be "rainy and really white" in theory, but despite having contact with whites throughout her schooling she was not prepared for the confusing feelings that

arose upon moving there. She knew Portland "felt different" compared to her hometown in South Carolina, and later described it as a feeling of "malaise" connected to a seeing a lack of Black people and culture in the city.

I also spoke with Jasmine, a 33-year-old multiracial Japanese and Iranian American woman. She earned her Ph.D. and moved to Portland five years ago to work in higher education. Like others, Jasmine felt positive about her early experiences in Portland, but this faded as she began to observe and experience subtle forms of racism:

> I think it took me a while to realize that things aren't fully what they seem when you visit versus when you live here full time. No one told me how very, very white it is because at first I thought the people were super nice and friendly and it's liberal here compared to the more conservative areas I got job offers in so I thought, why not. [...] I also noticed when I got here, like people let me merge on the highway, that's amazing. I go to the grocery store and everyone wants to have a freaking conversation about how my day is going. And I think that's what makes the racism and un-welcomingness so insidious here because it's so subtle and kept under wraps. I think it's that a lot of people here are like pretty well-intentioned, but unable or unwilling to acknowledge how white supremacy lives inside of them.

Ironically, it is Portland's liberal credentials and reputation for niceness that makes its racism so disturbing for Jasmine. On one hand, Portland's niceness attracts newcomers and bodes well for its public image; on the other hand, it is precisely this perception of niceness that contributes to feelings of disappointment, disillusionment, and frustration among people of color who live in one of the most white and liberal cities in the United States. This contradiction lies at the heart of the many complicated emotions reported by participants.

Ambient Racism

Emotions reveal the multiple dimensions through which race and racism operate in the lives of participants I interviewed. I argue that the diffuse and cumulative impact of the demographic, cultural, political context of Portland contribute to a range of emotional processes

that are inherently racialized. Similar to everyday ambient noise that drones in the background of day-to-day life, *ambient racism* emerges from a multiplicity of structural, institutional, interpersonal and emotional racial dynamics that Portlanders of color feel on a deep level. Expanding upon the noise metaphor, there is evidence that ambient noise (traffic, machinery, talking, etc.) in the urban soundscape can have a major impact on our mood and behaviors; the cumulative impact of exposure to environmental noise is even associated with increased risk of depression, anxiety, and heart problems (Beutel et al. 2016). Ambient noise has become so commonplace in modern life, that those exposed to it may adapt to it despite its negative consequences (Bosker 2019). Similarly, the omnipresence of race and racism in the lives of Portlanders of color I spoke to was so deeply rooted in multiple facets of everyday life, some expressed that their effects were felt subconsciously.

When I asked Daisy (39, Iranian American, woman) what impact she thinks Portland's demographics have on people of color, she said, "We can feel it. I can feel when I walk into a building and in the interactions I have with people make me feel uncomfortable. It's systemic. We can feel it in our nervous system. We know it on a subconscious level at the very least I think." Daisy comments on the emotional and bodily response to racial discomfort. For her, systemic racism seeps into the nervous system, and may even be felt subconsciously. Crystal (34, Black, woman), a recent transplant from South Carolina, also shared how being in Portland makes her feel:

> I could have a limited view of this, but I think it's just because like the city *feels* oppressive. I hate to say this but I'm new here and I feel like my eyes are fresh...it's just everywhere you go there's just the constant affirmation that this place was not created with you in mind as a Black person. It's this thing where you don't see any imagery or representation of yourself or people like you in positive positions of power or in a positive light it can make you feel a little but dejected and I feel like that's the feeling of being Black in Portland. Even when you look at from a policy basis, like the systemic racism of laws that excluded Black people here and the fact that I live in a neighborhood

that used to be predominantly black 20 years ago, and it's not that way anymore. So you think about that generational wealth that does not get passed on from having a home and you can tell people have been pushed to the outskirts. So I feel like a lot of that generates a general malaise in this city when you're a person of color, especially if you're Black. For me being new, I've heard you know, "Oh it's kind of like the underground railroad here to find other black people here". You have to make sure you're part of this group, that group, join this Facebook group if you want to make Black friends. It's not like a Black people welcome committee. You have to do more work here to find that community, which is different for me because in the south you ask a couple questions like "Oh where'd you go to school, who do you know?" and then automatically you're initiated into the Black family. So it's a different feel. That's just how I feel here.

Crystal describes a "general feeling of malaise" that permeates Portland, which she associates with a lack of community, histories of displacement, and the distinctly anti-Black legacy of racism in the city. Tellingly, the census tract that encompasses the Alberta district where Crystal lives saw its African American's share of the population decrease from 40 percent to 8 percent between 1990 and 2018 (United States Bureau of the Census 2018, Social Explorer). Like a ghost haunting the present, Crystal's feelings about Portland are inextricable from structural forces that have shaped the city long before she arrived there. Alex (49, Black, woman) also commented on the emotional impact of numerical underrepresentation for Black people in Portland:

I think everything to me is math. You live in a place with 75 percent white, 25 percent other and of that other, it fluctuates between 6 and 8 percent Black people, right? So just by the numbers alone, you can see why that would crush the others. So when you have the visual crushing, the psychological crushing, and then damn it be the emotional crushing. That is the final nail in the coffin. That is what causes the generational disease. Because when we are emotionally decrepit it's easy to give to our children. You know, so those are the things I think about. I look at it as a math equation, so just mathematically, gosh, it almost feels impossible to succeed.

Alex understands the overwhelmingly white demographic skew of Portland to result in an "emotional crushing" for Black people. For Alex, this coincides with a lack of Black representation in all areas of life, which can have intergenerational effects. She later shared that she has deep concerns about the well-being of Black youth being socialized in Portland.

36

Historical and contemporary demographic underrepresentation is a key component of *ambient racism*. As Crystal put it, it includes the feeling "that a place was not created with you in mind". In line with the popular adage, "You can't be what you don't see", Crystal and Alex understand that pervasive whiteness in Portland does not only operate at a systemic and policy level, but may also affect how individual Black Portlanders envision their potential to thrive in the city. Ambient racism shapes the emotions and self-perceptions of Portlanders of color (in this case, Black Portlanders) because it emerges from a range of historical processes that produce demographic underrepresentation and structural barriers to success.

I also spoke with Rachel, a 21-year-old Mexican American woman who grew up in Eugene, Oregon but moved to Portland two years before our interview to pursue her bachelor's degree at a university in the Portland area. Although she has lived in Oregon all her life, Rachel struggled to feel at ease in Portland:

> Being and living in the whitest metro area is really sad, honestly. And keep in mind I grew up in Eugene. But I still feel like I don't belong. Like not only because I'm not white, but also because I don't believe the same things, I don't fit into the general lifestyle. The way I want to live my life and the way I try to live my life is not reflected in the community here. It's hard to identify with. It's hard to feel like your able to move forward. It's this idea of I don't want to explain myself to you, and I don't want to be a token for you. I don't want you to think of me as your Mexican friend. I just want to be in a space where I don't have to explain everything all the time, a space where I don't have to be on guard, or worry that people won't understand me. I think it's a feeling of being trapped, but at the same time there's so much going on here that it's like overstimulating but at the same time you can't escape it and you just let it engulf you.

When I asked Rachel whether these experiences have shaped her future plans, she responded:

> I need to move on somewhere else. I can't move forward here. And emotionally too, it's hard. I've never lived in a town or city that is majority people of color. I've never had the experience of people selling elotes and fruit on my street and I never had the feeling that I live in a place I belong as a Mexican person where my culture is just normal. I know that's sad, but that also means I can move somewhere that has that. Like maybe somewhere in California like LA. I've just never had that and to find that I need to leave Portland.

Rachel longs to live in a place where Mexicans are a demographic majority rather than a peripheral, tokenized minority. She mentions a desire to live in a city like Los Angeles, where Mexicans and Mexican Americans are central to the cultural tapestry of the city. In Portland, Rachel does not only feel marginalized due to her race, but also feels at odds with the "general lifestyle" in the city and does not envision herself thriving there. Because race and culture are not mutually exclusive, this also means that the centrality of normative whiteness (Ward 2008) and white culture in places like Portland contribute to *ambient racism*, which is predicated upon the cumulative impact of a multitude of cultural, political, economic, and social dynamics that make racially marginalized groups *feel* alienated.

Although white supremacy is a global phenomenon, the power of ambient racism is inextricable from the particularities of place and regional racial formations (Cheng 2013). Victoria (44, Black/African, woman) articulated this while reflecting on her 9-year-old U.S.-born daughter's reaction on their first trip together to Victoria's hometown in central Africa:

> I took my daughter to [the country where I was raised] last year and she said, "Mama can I stay?" Because nobody looked at her for her color. They saw a child who is a child. They saw a little girl, and that's it. It didn't matter the color she had and she felt it. And that's how I was raised. To see people as people, not as color. So that's the thing. I took her there and she felt something different. She was welcome everywhere. Places define color differently. It's about the place. It's about the place. And people, we make these places. We make it. We make the place the way it is and we can fix it if we want. It's about the willingness. Are we willing to change the place? I don't think so.

Victoria knew that her daughter "felt something different" in the country where she was raised- so much so that she did not want to return to Portland. While the country in which she was raised is home to a range of ethnic groups, it is a country where most people would be considered phenotypically Black by U.S. standards. Victoria's daughter's reaction to being in a place where she felt like part of a racial majority is profound because it provided her with a temporary escape from racialization. There, her daughter could step out of the proverbial "veil" (Du Bois 1903)

and be a part of society without being defined by her race. Victoria's observations about the power of place also invoke an important point about ambient racism: *the social structures and circumstances that produce ambient racism are not fixed.* Social actors create the meaning and material consequences of race and place, so they can also change them (Omi and Winant 2015). Despite this, Victoria is skeptical about the possibility of change in Portland. Indeed, the historical and contemporary making of place in Portland involves anti-Black violence, exclusion, and displacement that are deeply woven into the fabric of the city's economy, culture, spatial arrangement, criminal justice system, and more (Brooks 2004; Gibson 2007; Serbulo and Gibson 2013). While there are always opportunities to transform the racial order, enduring racial systems weigh heavy on those subordinated by them. Victoria commented on this, and shared her thoughts about the power of racism:

> I think you can get sick. Racism can make you sick. You come home and you try to understand why you are treated the way you are, you're trying to understand why. Because this thing has multi dimensions. It looks one way today and another way tomorrow. It's a difficult monster and you can't keep up with it. If their [white people's] ancestors were able to wipe out entire generations of people, entire nations, what can we expect? What else can they do? We are part of history. Racism is very powerful. We are just trying to adapt to the way they organize the society. It's like a game, if you go left, they go right. So we have to be proactive. We have to work.

Here, Victoria conceptualizes a meaningful aspect of ambient racism. Reflecting on *why* she experiences racism, Victoria realizes that it "has multi dimensions". Racism is a shape-shifting phenomenon that manifests in multiple areas of life for racialized people. This is precisely why racism is an *ambient* force in the lives of participants I interviewed. Victoria understands that contemporary racism is deeply entrenched in histories of white supremacy that racialized people must contend with in the present. Despite this, she maintains a sense of agency. When we better-understand the "difficult monster", we can be more proactive in circumventing it.

Michael (46, Black, man) who works as a diversity practitioner for a Portland

governmental branch shared poignant thoughts about the reach of systemic racism in the lives of

people of color:

> If you don't even understand your own history and you come into an organization and
> you're a person of color and this thing has been moving for 126 years impacting you, you
> might think, am I going crazy? The answer is no, you're not going crazy, this machine
> has been going for 126 years! And you're just an individual[...] It's intangible. If people
> don't understand how racism works they can't put their hand on it. It's like a cloud. If
> you try to touch it it's not there. Unless you understand how institutions work it's really
> not easy to put your finger on it.

Importantly, Michael highlights how racism can seem invisible and intangible when operating

systemically. He links these historical systems to processes that make individual people of color

question their perception of reality. The framework of ambient racism helps us conceptualize the

connection between systemic processes and emotional processes that Michael describes.

Ambient racism may not be tangible, but it is certainly *felt*.

Feeling Ambient Racism: Isolation, Alienation, and Fear

One of the most common emotional frames participants used to describe their racial

experiences in Portland was isolation. Some of these feelings of isolation stemmed from

difficulties building and connecting with communities of color with which they felt comfortable.

Daisy, a 39-year-old Iranian American woman who grew up in the suburbs of Portland, is a

substitute teacher and yoga instructor who is also an administrator of a Facebook group that aims

to connect Black, Latinx, Asian American, and other communities of color in Portland by

creating POC-only events and social gatherings. She indicated that it can be challenging to

gather communities of color in Portland:

> It takes a lot of effort to gather people. I'm very understanding that there are a lot of
> people of color here who are traumatized. Not just from being POC but also connected to

other experiences or identities in addition to that. So sometimes it is hard to get people to even leave their house or their comfort zone. They know these opportunities exist but may struggle so hard financially, emotionally, psychologically that it's hard for folks to show up and participate in community. It can kind of be a vicious cycle. Isolation leads to trauma, depression, what have you, and that then keeps you from being in community leading to more isolation. But at the same time members of our online POC community say they are glad we have created this space and events and opportunities that are there when people are ready.

Daisy recognizes the cyclical processes that reinforce social isolation among communities of color in Portland. Anxiety about meeting new people and fears of being in public spaces were common among individuals I spoke to, including longtime residents. I asked Jen (a 23-year-old Korean American woman) whether she sought out community after moving to Portland from Los Angeles for college. She explained that her feelings of loneliness and isolation were especially strong during her freshman year when she struggled to build relationships:

I envy people who can makes friends naturally. I was so lonely, but lonely specifically for people of color. Of course I don't think I would have that feeling if I went to school in LA, at like UCLA[...] And you know, it began to feel like one obstacle after another so at a point I didn't really want to leave my house, and would opt to stay in and watch TV. That way I can have total control over what happens and there is no reason to put myself in any harm's way.

While moving to a new city for college can be lonely in a general sense, Jen understood her loneliness as having specifically racial causes. This is reflective of experiences of students of color attending a predominantly white institutions, where they report feeling lonely, tokenized, and face a multitude of institutional obstacles unlike their white peers (Moore 2008).

Soojin, a 42-year-old Korean American woman who moved to the U.S. from Korea 12 years prior to our interview, admitted that she wants to see more social events for Asians and Asian Americans in Portland, but feels that spaces to openly discuss racism and racial identity would be more powerful in combating feelings of deep isolation:

Yes, I'd love to see more Asian people and go to karaoke, but I also think we need spaces to talk about more deep experience. I feel extra isolated because as an immigrant who

chose to be here and having later life awareness of race issues. As an immigrant I think there is a voice that says you should be grateful, rather than criticize what we don't have. So I don't know anybody else who went through this process and I feel so alone.

Because she is an immigrant who chose to be in the United States, Soojin struggled to reconcile her choice to live in Portland with the isolation she feels living in the city. For participants like Soojin, the idea that immigrants should be grateful for the "gift" of being in the United States may make them feel like they are not entitled to critique American society (Nguyen 2012). Although Soojin was able to combat these feelings, she still feels alienated from both U.S.-born people of color who may not understand her experiences as an Asian immigrant, as well as other immigrants of color who may not think from a similar place of race consciousness.

Isolation and fear were closely related emotions in the narratives of participants; some described their feelings of isolation as tied to fears about being in public spaces and predominantly white environments. Because most public spaces in Portland are predominantly white, the demographic reality of the city is integral to feelings of fear and isolation among racialized groups. I asked Jen to explain why she avoided public spaces, and she recounted traumatizing experiences she's had in Portland, including racial and sexual harassment on public transit, in restaurants, and walking in the city. She also provided a compelling metaphor to explain her fears:

> You know when you're in a bar or in a building and you're like, this place is not earthquake proof. This is definitely not structurally sound or following regulations. You know how you sometimes notice those things? So that's kind of how it feels to not be white in Portland. Like, this place is full of white people and if anything happened to me, like harassment, discrimination, I don't think I can count on anyone to help me. At least that's how it felt. So that kind of thing is just as important to me as something like earthquake safety. If there's an earthquake and the building you're in is not structurally sound no matter who you are, you will be trapped. And it's like if someone was to harass me or do whatever, there is just no getting out of the situation, for a long time I felt it was my fault for having been there in the first place, but it's really the systems that fail us.

Jen's sense of isolation stems from feelings of insecurity and discomfort that are uniquely racial and gendered. Just as an earthquake could strike at any moment, Jen anticipates that she could be targeted for her race and/or gender at any moment. This metaphor conveys the recognition that, if an overt act of racism were to occur, she would not be in a safe context—that if the "earthquake" were to come, her surroundings would not be protective. This is an important extension of our understanding of racism as a more complex trauma does not come just from the aggressor's act itself, but also from the victim's knowledge that they are unlikely to obtain justice, or even recognition and validation from bystanders, institutions, acquaintances and colleagues. It therefore makes sense that Jen chooses to stay home when she has the option, since that is one of the few places she feels in control of her social environment and safety. Roger, a 29-year-old Chinese American man shared similar feelings. He noted that these feelings of insecurity are especially strong when he is in suburbs and upper-middle class neighborhoods in and around Portland, stating, "I think people might stare just a little too long. There's not a lot of people out in the community so if you're walking or driving through I see people looking longer than they need to. I also worry if something bad were to happen I bet all these people would close their door and be watching TV. I don't feel like I could count on those people for help if something were to happen.". For participants like Jen and Roger, lack of trust in white people reinforce feelings of fear and insecurity in public space.

Discomfort around whites was echoed by others like Lan, a 34-year-old Vietnamese woman who moved to Portland seven years prior to our interview from Ho Chi Minh City. Lan has a background in accounting but works with the Vietnamese community in Portland as a tenant protection coordinator. Being fluent in Vietnamese and English, Lan provides resources for Vietnamese-speaking tenants with limited English skills and helps them negotiate their rights

with landlords. Lan told me that once she was in a financial position to become a homeowner, she and her partner intentionally sought a home in one of the few racially diverse Portland neighborhoods, even if that meant and living near the outskirts of the city where there is less access to parks, public transit, and walkable sidewalks. When I asked why she prefers a diverse neighborhood, Lan said, "I personally don't like to live among the white, especially when it's all white. I feel isolated when I'm with the white people". When I asked Lan why she felt this way around white people, she shared that she feels she has little in common with them and has had past experiences in which she felt white people treated her unfairly because of her Vietnamese accent and appearance, noting, "they assume you don't know anything, they assume you don't know English and treat you that way". These experiences lead Lan to lack trust in white people.

Some longtime residents experienced a loss of community due to gentrification and displacement, resulting in feelings of grief and alienation. I spoke with Kristina, a 23-year-old multiracial woman who identifies as African American and Mexican. At the time of our interview Kristina was attending community college taking general education classes. Kristina's dad is an African immigrant, and her mom was born in Mexico. She grew up in what she described as a lower-middle class family in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Northeast Portland, which experienced accelerated gentrification throughout the 1990's and 2000's. Between 2000 and 2018, the Black share of the population in Kristina's census tract went from 48 percent to 19 percent (United States Bureau of the Census 2018, Social Explorer). While Kristina's family was able to stay in the neighborhood, she shared what that loss of community meant for her:

> My dad is Somalian so I grew up having this rich community around me that I knew my language and my culture. Same thing with my mom's side- I speak Spanish and I know where I came from. When that community is taken away from you, there's a part of you that goes with it. Because like, okay I have these people around me. Now I don't have

44

anybody. I'm kind of on my own. I have to learn who I am all over again because I'm by myself now. So when you take a whole community away you're basically taking someone's identity away with them, but they don't realize that. They're taking away the village that was here to help with the kids, to feed the kids, you're taking away people who were always there to help whether they were family or not […] There were people you could trust. I could go down the street to someone's house and get food after school. I could get food from my grandma who lived nearby and looking back I realized it really felt like a community, there was a strong community sense and most of us were people of color, but now that's gone.

Kristina's sense of identity is deeply tied to community and place. She feels a loss of identity tied to the loss of her close-knit community due to gentrification. In line with the saying, "it takes a village to raise a family", Kristina's village did not only validate her cultural and racial identities, but was also a key community network of trust that her family could rely on when kids needed to be cared for, fed, or watched over. These place-based social networks and infrastructure are key sources of support for working-class immigrant communities and communities of color (Lee and Zhou 2015). When that sense of community dissolved, Kristina lost community resources and began to feel alienated from her own sense of self. Kristina shared with me that she struggled with depression throughout high school, indicating that her mental health struggles were, in part, tied to feelings of loneliness after her friends and community moved away:

> They talk about depression a lot when you're in high school, but as a teen it hit me hard. There were days when I refused to go to school, days where I would just be crying, and being like a hermit crab in my bed. I did see a counselor, but it just hits you. When you feel like you have no one and all your friends are leaving your high school because they have to move away, you're like what? I would eat lunch alone and it would just hit me.

Kristina's experiences are in many ways specific to Black and some Latinx communities in Portland who have been disproportionately impacted by gentrification relative to whites and other groups (Nguyen 2018; Shaw and Sullivan 2011). Her story demonstrates how

gentrification- a social problem that is inextricable from racism- takes an emotional toll on those affected, including those who stay in the neighborhood and watch their community dissolve.

Ana, a 42-year-old multiracial Mexican American and white woman, who also grew up in Northeast Portland, shared similar experiences. She was raised by a working-class single mother and came of age in in the Concordia neighborhood in Northeast Portland in the 80's and 90's. Ana reflected on the ways gentrification changed her relationship to her neighborhood and community:

> Fuck, it's alienating. It's awful. It's hard because I used to be part of a community that was so tight knit and we all didn't have shit. If all we had was three food stamps collectively among us we could still make shit happen. You had a bag of rice, I had some beans, and somebody could come up with maybe an onion, and we could cover our households together. I don't have that kind of space or relationship with people here anymore. For a long time I would walk down this street here and just be pissed. And you know, I reflect on it and now that I have some money to eat I don't know where I want to give my money to because the new businesses here are all alien and the people in them I don't like. I don't like the way the people look at me through the window. Fuck, that was hard.

Like Kristina, Ana described feelings of loss and alienation associated with gentrification and the dissolution of collective community ties that she relied on to survive when resources were scarce. Ironically, Ana felt a stronger sense of community when she had no money to eat. Even though Ana has lived most of her life in Northeast Portland and now has access to more income, she began to feel like a stranger in her own neighborhood as gentrification progressed, resenting new businesses and the largely white, upper-middle class incomers who arrived to the area. Indeed, between 2000 and 2010, the census tract that encompasses the Concordia neighborhood saw a 43 percent decrease in its Black population and 20 percent increase in its white population (Portland City and Community Life 2010 Census Data for Portland Neighborhoods). Those with incomes over 75k jumped from 19 percent of Concordia's population to 34 percent (United States Bureau of the Census 2010 Social Explorer). Ana told me that she is not as resentful as

she once was, indicating that she still lives with anger but said "the problem is bigger than just

my feelings". Regardless, Ana remembers the time between 2000 and 2010 as an especially

emotionally distressing time in her life. These emotional responses to the social and structural

environment also led to particular forms of emotional labor in which many participants partook

while navigating everyday life in Portland.

Managing Ambient Racism: Navigating Everyday Life in White Space

Safety and Public Space

Many participants carried out "careful situation assessments" (Feagin 1991) to

comfortably and safely participate in mundane activities such as using public transport and

walking down the street. The omnipresence of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in the

everyday lives of Portlanders of color may require extraneous forms of labor that include

assessing risk, "reading rooms", and observing the demeanor and behaviors of dominant groups

to secure comfort and safety in white space (Anderson 2018). Ambient racism produces

emotions that are tied to the particularities of Portland's history and demographics and places the

burden of performing emotional labor on racialized individuals (Evans and Moore 2015;

Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012; Wingfield 2010).

Jen (23, Korean American, woman) discussed racialized and gendered harassment she

experienced on Portland public transport and reflected on the ways she coped with everyday life

in Portland:

> **Jen:** I've just had bad experiences traveling on public transport. I would have people
> yelling at me in various Asian languages, so that was not great. I had this person follow
> me around to tell me how attractive Asian women are. The thing is that sometimes I was
> alone and if there was like a houseless person yelling racist stuff at me, I'm also not going
> to yell at them because who knows how unstable or unwell that person might be. But
> there was this one white guy who did not look homeless or mentally unstable who just

followed me around town and told me how attractive Asian women are. He was just this white guy who genuinely thought he was giving me a huge compliment. This kind of thing would happen so frequently that I kind of already know how to turn off and just keep walking and figure out ways so no one can follow me and I've been doing that for so long its like second nature. I'm sure this kind of thing happens to Asian women no matter where you go, but I feel like in Portland there's a high concentration of white men who think like that. Because if you're a white person in Portland, most of your friends are also most likely white and then if you meet a person of color, and that person of color is traumatized by you, they're not gonna want to hangout with you […] It's like being in defense mode all the time, which I'm not sure is entirely healthy, but at the same time, we all been through so much hurt so that was kind of our natural response. So all of this stuff I was experiencing in the classroom, in peer groups, on the street, everywhere, it just became too much to the point where I was like I don't want to always be doing this extra work so I'm just gonna try to cut it all out. That's when I decided to move back to LA.
A: You said you felt you were in defense mode all the time. What does that entail specifically?
Jen: I realized wherever I go, people could single me out because of how I look. So I'm always calculating, how many people of color are there, whether I feel like I can talk to them or not, how many white people are there, do I feel like they're 'cool' white people, does anyone seem threatening? Then it becomes constant strategizing just to get through the day. I think that impulse has faded away a bit now that I live in LA but it's definitely still there.

Jen describes how she calculates risk in everyday situations involving white people (namely, white men). She suggests that white Portlanders' lack of exposure to people of color exacerbate these racialized and gendered encounters in public life. As a self-described "conventionally feminine Asian woman" Jen realizes that her experiences may be amplified in a majority white place like Portland but are also tied to broader racial and gendered constructions that cast Asian women as exotic, passive, and sexualized subjects (Chen 1997). Jen admitted that her internal process of assessing risk in everyday situations became "second nature", which points to the ways subordinated groups may begin to normalize their own oppression and discomfort (David and Derthick 2014; Fanon 1952). Perhaps it was not the experiences of racialized and gendered harassment, microaggressions, and pervasive whiteness *per se* that drove Jen's decision to move back to LA, but rather the cumulative emotional fatigue resulting from "being in defense mode all the time".

Practices like counting people of color in their surroundings and assessing the demeanor of white people were reported coping strategies mentioned by ten other participants, including Denise (42, Black, woman), who said, "I wasn't checking for white people or counting white people for reassurance that there are still some people of color around when I lived in LA. I took it for granted that I was not surrounded by whiteness, but in Portland I assume I will be surrounded by whiteness and celebrate it when I'm not." For Denise, being surrounded by whiteness is the default in Portland; she admitted that she's gotten used to counting phenotypically white people and nonwhite people while in public spaces and in her neighborhood – a practice she would not have done regularly living in LA.

Lara (23, Colombian American, woman) explained how she assesses her safety while using public transit in Portland. Because she does not have a car, she relies on Portland public transport to get to school, work, and her internship, which are all located in different parts of the city. Lara avoids the MAX light rail due to safety concerns, so she primarily uses the bus, with caution:

> It's become an ongoing joke but it's actually serious because people of color have been killed by white supremacists on public transport here, so like if you're brown in Portland you know you don't get on the MAX. Brown people don't go on the MAX and if you do, you have to be careful about it. I try to actively avoid taking the MAX. Also if you are on the bus be sure you're sitting or standing near the door just in case you have to escape. I know that people out here are capable of horrible things so I try to be as careful as possible. I don't have a car so I pretty much rely on the bus for everything. I remember when I started using public transit I would always sit next to the bus driver because I would think, "the bus driver will protect me if something goes wrong". I guess its strategic, so I usually sit right behind the back door of the bus. I don't know, I guess that makes me feel safer.

Lara takes calculated steps to avoid racist violence and danger in public space. From identifying 'escape routes' to strategizing safer seat choices, Lara does additional labor that POC and other marginalized groups must often do while participating in mundane activities. For Lara,

it is common knowledge that "brown people don't go on the MAX" without risking their safety especially after the 2017 MAX stabbing. Even if POC have access to public transportation, some may hesitate to use it due to fear of racialized violence. Respondents' fears are not unfounded; reported hate crimes in Portland have increased approximately 161 percent between 2015 and 2019, with 62 percent of them taking place in public spaces like trains, busses, sidewalks, and parking lots (Portland Police Bureau Bias/Hate Crime Statistics 2019). 65 percent of reported hate crimes in Portland during this period were deemed race-based.

Tashi (39, Tibetan American, woman) also mentioned fears about using public transport when I asked if there were any places in Portland she felt uncomfortable:

> **Tashi:** When I first moved back here after grad school in 2015 I would go to bars by myself, walk around by myself. I was always worried about being attacked, or being targeted by white supremacists or harassed on public transport which I have been before. So I stopped going on public transit for those reasons for my own safety. There were horror stories going around of people of color being harassed on busses and the MAX. This was before the stabbing, and then when that happened it was like our fears we confirmed in the worst possible way.
> **A:** Do you still have those fears?
> **Tashi:** Well now despite all that I don't feel as uncomfortable in white spaces anymore because it's exhausting and I don't want to live in fear in my own city. I was scared before and people have a million reasons to be scared here. But it's a lot of emotional work because like you're always wondering, what if there is a white supremacist walking around your neighborhood with a gun? That's happened before. Even in my neighborhood Patriot Prayer was out in public out by Screen Door which is pretty close to my house and I walk down that street all the time so I think of these scenarios in my head.

Like others, Tashi limits and regulates her movement through public space in response to the perceived threat of white supremacists and everyday racial, gendered harassment. The looming threat of violence and amount of "emotional work" it entails fatigued her because the burden of managing emotions invoked by ambient racism lies on Tashi.

Despite some participants' relative level of class privilege, varying racial identities, and phenotypical traits, participants like Jen, Tashi, Lara, and others *felt* an emotional burden

associated with strategically maneuvering through public space in Portland. Blauner (1972) notes, "In order to control a racially defined people, systematically and maintain special privileges for the dominant group, limits must be placed on the movement of the oppressed minority" (36). While Blauner is mainly referring to African Americans, who are uniquely policed and surveilled in public life (Feagin 1991; Ferguson 2000; Ritchie 2017), participant narratives also reveal how a demographically diverse group of POC understand their experiences and emotions as they navigate public space in a predominantly white city. Importantly, the dangers imposed on POC as they move through white space (Anderson 2018) is directly related to the relative invisibility of whiteness and the ease of movement whites enjoy via white privilege (Lipsitz 2011; Pulido 2000; Twine and Gardener 2013). My sample's skew toward women of color may also explain how the intersection of race and gender shapes experiences of vulnerability and violence (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991). These narratives do not only characterize Portland's racial, gendered, and spatial hierarchies, but also highlight a particular emotional dimension of racial life wherein pervasive whiteness and the ever-present *potential* for violence requires people of color to participate in extraneous forms of emotional labor in order to comfortably carry out daily mundane activities. These narratives characterize Portland's racial, gendered, and spatial hierarchies, and highlight how ambient racism produces an ever-present *potential* for violence that requires people of color to participate in extraneous forms of emotional labor in order to comfortably carry out daily mundane activities. For many participants, racialized emotional labor also took the form of impression management at the micro-level.

 Impression Management and Code-Switching

Goffman's theory of impression management posits that our interactional exchanges are contingent upon how we anticipate others will perceive us (1967). While Goffman did not address racism, his dramaturgical framework is complemented by Du Bois' *double consciousness*, which refers to the psychological challenge that African Americans face by constantly having to view themselves through the eyes of a racist white society. As a result, Black Americans and other people of color with multiply marginalized identities may manage their demeanor, emotions, and physical appearance in order to preserve social harmony and job security while around whites (Evans and Moore 2015; Harlow 2003; Wingfield 2010). These dynamics were strongly reflected in participant narratives, constituting a form of emotional labor predicated upon Portland's pervasive whiteness and the cumulative emotional impact it has in the everyday lives of Portlanders of color.

Participants like Kristina (23, Black and Mexican, woman) struggled to feel like she could truly be herself in mostly-white contexts:

> You end up feeling pressure to put up this facade every day to be able to assimilate with white people. Not all are bad and it's not one person's fault, but I'm just saying there's a certain way you have to be within that environment. It's sad but it's true within Portland. It might be different if I was living in Houston or Los Angeles or the south because I could be who I am. Here you can't. You can, but to a certain level. You can't go above a certain level. I can be educated, but not too educated. I can be ghetto, but I can't be too ghetto. I can be black, but I can't be too black. Or I can be Latina and I can't be too Latina. So it's like there's that thing where it's like 'oh you can be who you are, but only up to this point, because we're gonna think of you a certain way", and it's like who gave you that right?

As a multiracial Black and Latina woman from a working-class background, Kristina feels pressure to "tone down" aspects of her identity and personality that are uniquely racialized, classed, and gendered. Kristina does not pinpoint individual white people as the source of this pressure, but rather, it emerges as part of an "environment" that makes her feel like she cannot be herself. She also understands this experience as unique to Portland, and that this oppressive

52

dynamic may not be as pervasive in racially diverse cities like Houston or Los Angeles. Barbara

(49, Japanese American, woman) also articulated this problem when describing her experience

moving from Los Angeles: "It was just shocking for me because in California race was not really

on my mind. Now when I meet people I really think about how they perceive me. I never thought

much about that before." While the racial dynamics described by Kristina and Barbara are

certainly not limited to Portland, they point out how demographics and localized racial politics

distinguish it from other places.

   Daniel, a 23-year-old Mexican-identified man who was born and raised in Portland,

shared that he often feels compelled to adjust his demeanor to quell the anxieties of white

shopkeepers when he goes shopping at boutiques in "hipster" neighborhoods throughout the city:

> I often go to the Hawthorne neighborhood which is like a trendy street in Portland with a
> lot of shops and hipster places. Going there I always felt like I had to make myself not
> seem like a threat. I was always conscious about putting the owners at ease like "hey I'm
> not stealing anything." They never said anything like "hey are you stealing?", it was just I
> felt it would be safer to make it known I was not gonna steal. I'm not sure if that's my
> own anxiety or something close to reality. Am I just completely crazy for being scared?
> It's hard to pinpoint until something happens, or you get called out and its tricky because
> its not overt. There's nothing I can prove about the people in there. We don't know for
> sure what their thoughts are, but what I can do is guess that that racism might be there...
> so it's like, is this in my head?

Although racism is hard to "prove" in these settings, Daniel ruminates on the possibility that he

is being perceived as a potential thief. Despite his discomfort, Daniel adjusts his demeanor to put

shopkeepers at ease.

   Jasmine (33, Iranian and Japanese American, woman) also described the ways she styles

her hair in anticipation of the ways whites might perceive her. She is light-skinned and shared

that she can "pass" as white in some settings, depending on how she curates her appearance:

> This is probably my privilege, but I find that there are spaces in which it's more
> beneficial for me to show up as more white- appearing, so I do things like blow-dry and
> straighten my hair almost every day before work. Or like when I was hanging out with

my ex-partner's friends who were all white, I felt like I had to show up more white and be more like them.

Unlike many people of color I interviewed, Jasmine has the option (and privilege) to strategically amplify aspects of her appearance that assist her in "passing" as white at work and in all-white peer settings. Like Daniel, Jasmine's actions, decisions, and emotions are inextricable from how she thinks white people will perceive her. While most people regardless of race construct their "front stage" according to the interpretive meaning of a particular situation (Goffman 1967), this extra step in Jasmine's hair care routine is uniquely racialized because the centrality of whiteness defines dominant perceptions of reality, including norms of physical appearance (Collins 2015 [1990]); Fanon 1952). In this sense, the omnipresence of the "white gaze" (Fanon 1952) is central to ambient racism, as it permeates the minutiae of everyday life for people of color like Jasmine and others who must frequently anticipate how whites will perceive them.

Some participants engaged in a form of emotional labor commonly called "code-switching". From a linguistics standpoint, code-switching is formally defined as the process of alternating between two or more languages, often within the same phrase or sentence (Gardner-Chloros 2010). However, code-switching has been increasingly used to describe the ways marginalized groups change the ways they express themselves depending on the situational contexts in which they find themselves (Denby 2013). For some people of color this may include changing their demeanor and/or the way they talk when around people of other races to maintain rapport (Pew Research Center 2019). Drawing from Hochschild (1979), code-switching should be considered a form of emotional labor because it involves a level of emotional management that is structured by the power dynamics of the environment in which they are enacted. Code-switching requires work on the part of the "switcher" who must shift their self-expression to become culturally compatible with dominant groups.

Cindy, a 24-year-old Vietnamese American woman I spoke to works at a political lobbying firm in Portland. She is one of the few people of color in her workplace and admitted that she code-switches often while at work:

> **Cindy:** I have had to do a lot of gymnastics at work here in Portland. There's so much code switching.
> **A:** In what situations do you feel like you need to code switch?
> **Cindy:** I feel like when I'm around white people, especially older white people I always have to be on alert, but when I'm talking to a person of color I don't feel the pressure to be "on" in the same way. With other people of color, I feel like you can take pressure off a bit and not worry about having to be so formal or be worried about whether they like you. When I'm interacting with white higher ups I feel like a kid at a dance, or a kid at school who's worried about whether they're gonna be liked. The way I see it is you're coming into a space that was not intentionally created for you. It gets complicated even more when you're a woman of color.

In contrast to more relaxed interactions with other people of color, Cindy feels pressure to perform "likeability" while interacting with older white people in her workplace. She also recognizes that intersecting gender and racial dynamics complicate her experiences navigating a workplace that she feels was not created for her to thrive. Similarly, Lara (22, Columbian American, woman) admitted she felt singled-out for the way she talks while working at her internship:

> I've had to do a lot of code switching at my internship because when I first got here I wasn't much aware of how I talk and how different it is from people here, so people would tell me "oh you sound ghetto" or "I like your accent" and I was like oh... I didn't know I have an accent? Why am I being made to feel like I need to change the way I talk depending on the people I'm around? That's a lot of work. But sometimes I do try to change my tone and use more formal vocabulary depending who I'm with.

Back-handed compliments like "I like your accent" are couched in racialized and class stigmas around language and dialect (Vasquez 2010). Even if unintended, these microaggressive comments mark individuals like Lara as a "racialized other", which creates the expectation that she should adjust to the interactional norms of the white space she occupies if she wants to fit in. Other participants like Yesenia (23, Mexican American, woman) indicated how code-switching

became almost second-nature in professional settings is in Portland, stating, "There's a lot of emotional labor I have to put up with working in the nonprofit world and it's a whole process. I've gotten used to code switching and speaking the language with white people, which is not ideal but I'm just used to it now I almost forget I'm doing it." For Yesenia, code-switching is a habitual practice. Even if she forgets she is doing it, code-switching constitutes additional emotional labor.

I also spoke with Victoria, a 44-year-old Black woman who was born and raised in central Africa. She moved to Washington D.C. in 2005, living there for eight years before moving to Eugene, Oregon for two years to complete a master's degree, then to Portland to work in public health. Victoria admitted that she was shocked to learn how Black people are treated in the U.S. but found the racial dynamics in Portland particularly disturbing. Victoria noted that she has approximately 80 colleagues working on her floor at a government public health office, and only two of them are Black. She shared openly about how her African American friends in Portland helped her learn interactional "codes" that would assist her in navigating racial and gender dynamics as a Black woman in a majority white workplace:

> **Victoria:** I came here hoping to empower myself more as a woman and go back more empowered but now I'm just dealing with racism. And because I was not raised here I had to rely on my African American friends to tell me how it works here. They tell me you are raised to be a second class here and your skin, the more dark is worse. My African American friends even taught me code words. Code words...imagine?! These are things I learned when I came to America. I came here filled with pride as a Black African woman. Pride. I believe in raising your head up, speak up. And my African American friends said "No, no, no, here your skin color is what defines you".
> **A:** What were some of the codes your friends taught you?
>
> **Victoria:** I have one friend, an African American woman, who told me you have to be nice to the people who handle your pay in HR. She told me to make nice comments such as "Oh, you look pretty today!", "Oh my god, your hair looks beautiful". She said you have to give them 3 or 4 of these beautiful words for them to work with you. You have to navigate this system to get what you want. She said, Victoria, only you know who you are, only you know your worth and your value. But it's true, I also saw in my own office.

These white people, particularly white woman respond well to praise. Say how beautiful they are, make them feel good. So I learned these codes and I learn how to get someone always smiling. My friend said, you make them smile and then you tell them what you need! She said, Victoria, this is America, you have to smile here. She also taught me how to be careful at work, such as telling me not to be on my computer too much doing my own stuff because she said they will always come and check and judge my productivity. She also told me to write down everything that happens at work in detail because you might need that later. So again, I rely on these African American women to know what to say and what not to say. They been working and living in this country their whole life, so they know. They know. I go to them all the time.

Victoria has a difficult time reconciling her pride as a Black African woman with the inescapable realities of race in Portland and in the United States. At the micro-level, she learns to perform "strategic friendliness" in order to maintain job security and rapport with colleagues (Pierce 1995; Wingfield 2010). In Victoria's America, smiling may not convey feelings of personal happiness; rather, her smile serves to comfort others. Victoria understands that in order to "get what she needs" she should carefully manage her impression and emotions in order to make white people "feel good". Victoria and others carefully managed their self-expression and constructed their demeanor in ways that cater to white norms. The pressure to carry out this type of emotion work does not necessarily emerge from any one person (i.e. a 'racist' co-worker) or place (racism is not limited to the workplace or MAX train) but make up the overarching context of ambient racism in which Portlanders of color *feel* the omnipresent weight of race.

Racial Gaslighting

In the "post-racial era" covert racism operates subtly, rather than overtly in the day-to-day lives of racially subordinated groups, making it difficult to pinpoint and process (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Portland's progressive reputation and the pervasiveness of microaggressions and covert racism led some participants to struggle to define particular scenarios and feelings as inherently racial. Some convinced themselves they were "making it up", blaming their feelings

on their own personal shortcomings. However, some later came to realize that they were not alone in their feelings; rather, their emotions were also linked to group experiences and systemic problems manifesting in their everyday lives. This was apparent in Jen's earthquake metaphor, when she said, "for a long time I felt it was my fault for having been there [in the structurally unsound space] in the first place, but it's really the systems that fail us."

Nearly half of participants I interviewed described experiences reflective of *racial gaslighting*- the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist or question the racial status quo (Davis and Ernst 2019). Gaslighting is a common concept utilized by psychologists and family therapists to describe abusive power tactics primarily within the realm of intimate or familial relationships in which "one person undermines another person's confidence and stability by causing the victim to doubt their own senses and beliefs" (Kline 2006). However, gaslighting is not only limited to interpersonal intimate relationships, and should be understood as rooted in social inequalities (Sweet 2019). In this sense, racial gaslighting results from structural conditions that extend beyond interpersonal relationships, causing people of color to question their perceptions of reality in a racialized society.

For several participants, it took time to realize that the source of their discomfort in Portland may stem from interpersonal, institutional, and historical racism. Alex (49, Black, woman) shared:

> So a lot of this is learning the context of the city. And you can know the history, but until you feel the history and the trauma associated with continued generational aspects of race here, you know people don't realize most of the time that they're dealing with is racism. So how can you deal with it if you don't know exactly what you're dealing with because people here want so badly to be progressive. I think that's what was making me feel like the problem was me. So you don't even realize the passivity of your mind because you are socialized in a racist place and you don't even see it. I was having a hard time understanding that we were having the same conversations that my parents and

58

grandparents had. But these conversations were happening in 2015 in progressive Portland, Oregon.

From Alex's perspective, Portland's purported progressivism keeps people of color from fully identifying racism and othering when they experience it. She admits that people of color in Portland may develop a "passivity of the mind" if they do not come to terms with the reality of Portland's racial context. When I asked Alex to explain how she came to this racial consciousness she said:

> I felt when I moved here I became a target. So for me, I'm originally from Chicago and I didn't get it right away. I thought at first, oh this is just me. Is it my breath? What's happening here? I was asking myself, what am I doing to put off this energy? And after two years of struggling my therapist was like, so this is not in your mind. This is real.

Alex was socialized in a place where she was surrounded by Black people and other communities of color; she did not initially understand the salience of race- particularly what it means to be Black in Portland. She began to question whether she was to blame for her feelings and struggles with the city's racial climate. It wasn't until she sought therapy that Alex realized she was not the source of the problem. The significance of therapy was also iterated by Soojin (42, Korean American, woman), who is a mental health counselor. She said, "I have many therapy clients who are people of color and they often seem to question themselves and dig into their own individual psychology when figuring out the origins of their depression, rather than what it means to live in this very white world". Soojin's awareness of these racial dynamics stem from her experiences struggling within similar circumstances. She admitted that she spent years feeling confused about her relationship to the U.S. racial hierarchy after immigrating to the U.S from South Korea:

> There was a moment that became really clear that I was relating more with the white crowd than POC crowd. I became really confused because I'm a person of color, but why am I empathizing more with the white crowd? And what is wrong with me? That's when I

realized that I had been trying to conform so much into the white world that I accepted their voice as my voice, and suppressed my own voice.

Soojin's educational and professional credentials as well as Asian American's relative status as a model minority or "buffer group" (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Kim 1999; Lee and Zhou 2015) may grant her forms of economic, symbolic, and cultural capital that are not accessible to other racialized groups. However, her experiences as a racialized person in majority white Portland also demonstrate how people of color may internalize racial ideologies that reinforce the centrality of whiteness (David and Derthick 2014). When people of color become preoccupied with "digging into their own psychology" it may be more difficult to recognize how their personal struggles are also rooted in structural forms of racism and inequality that extend beyond the individual. Du Bois understood this process long before the concept of internalized racism was articulated, writing in *The Souls of Black Folk*: "The facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression" (1903:12). As Du Bois explained, the color line has distinctly emotional outcomes for 'the darker races' that cannot be reduced to personal pathology.

Jasmine (32, Iranian American and Japanese American, woman) also shared her personal struggles with racism, mental health, and self-blame. She attributes Portland's tendency toward covert forms of racism to the decline of her mental health:

> It's interesting because even though racism was more explicit in places I've lived in the Midwest, I felt like I had a better grasp on it and my mental health was a lot better when I was living there. I think it's because you immediately know racism when you saw it. Here, it's different. I think the racism and oppression here is so subtle and so under the radar and so cloaked in messages of social justice and activism that it feels like constant gaslighting living here. I was actually just today dealing with this confluence of having or grieving a relationship with a very white cis, hetero man. And having to heal from dealing with those dynamics, and the gaslighting that came along with that and the defensiveness that came with that. And now dealing with some of those same dynamics in the workplace and having my anxiety show up in pretty big ways in both of those parts of my life. So on the way to work I was just sitting on the bus and crying...just like, am I

the common denominator here? Am I just not able to manage my anxiety and depression and all of these things that have manifested themselves in huge ways since moving here? And yeah, it just starts to feel crazy-making. But it often feels like self-gaslighting where I can't get myself out of that space of shame, like oh it must just be me. But I think that rationally, so much of it is being in this city and being around just, a shit ton of white people who think they get it and who think they're woke and when anyone even questions their wokeness they make you feel crazy.

Jasmine felt more secure in places where racism was more explicit and easier to pinpoint. It is Portland's purported "wokeness" that distorts Jasmine's perception of her own feelings. Adding to her discomfort, she recognizes that unequal racial and gendered power dynamics she experienced in an intimate relationship with a white man were also manifesting in other areas of her life, including work. This highlights how racial gaslighting may take place beyond the scope of intimate relationships, emerging from social contexts and hierarchies that give gaslighting its power. This was also echoed when Daniel (24, Mexican American, man) shared his feelings about dealing with the potential of racism while shopping in Portland: "It's tricky because it's not overt. There's nothing I can prove about the people in there [the store]. We don't know for sure what their thoughts are but what I can do is guess that that racism might be there, so it's like, is this in my head?" Jen (23, Korean American, woman) expanded upon this troubling dynamic:

> I think with racism in Portland it's always so hard to pinpoint when it actually is about race. Like, am I crazy or is this place racist? That's why it made me feel like I was the crazy one for questioning whether people were racist. Like at a restaurant I would be treated strangely and a waitress or someone sitting nearby would look at me weird and I would be like, is she giving me a weird look because she thinks I can't speak English? And it totally may not be that, but the thing is, why am I questioning everything in the first place? Because I've had so many of these experiences. And if you haven't experienced it, you just won't recognize it, and also being a person who has a lot of mental health stuff going on like OCD and bipolar, anxiety, depression. I have a laundry list and my brain is like a salad with so many components and they're all bad. So I'm like maybe I am just being really anxious? Maybe this is just a symptom of a deeper mental health issue I'm having.

Whether or not their everyday experiences and interactions were inherently colored by racism, participants like Jen and others constantly questioned their own perception of reality, which manifested as a cyclical process of self-questioning, self-blame, and shame. Jen shared that she did not have these feelings while living in Los Angeles. Like Soojin's therapy clients, she spent a lot of time focusing on her own psychological pathologies rather than the structural characteristics of her social environment. Jasmine also individualized her mental health struggles:

> Right now honestly I don't know what I do to take care of myself. Lately it's been so bad that I have had to start medication for anxiety and depression, which I've never had to take regularly. So like, I'm doing a litany of things. I go to therapy, I do acupuncture, I try to meditate, I take my medications, I journal. I'm doing all the things I'm supposed to be doing and all those forces together just don't feel strong enough to mute just how much I feel broken down by being in this place. And that's really disheartening. And I mean, I found a really amazing therapist but she's really expensive. Because of everything going on I end up having to see her more often and yeah, it's a cost for sure.

While Jasmine's income, cultural capital, and professional status allow her to access a variety of mental health resources and self-care activities, she still feels like they do not adequately address her anxiety and depression. Jasmine understands her mental health struggles as uniquely place-based, as she feels living in Portland has amplified them. Regardless, she spends large amounts of time and money on personal mental health maintenance. These practices are reflective of the neoliberal tendency to medicalize mental health, which situates illness within the individual rather than the social realm (Esposito and Perez 2014). Thus, racial gaslighting emerges from sets of conditions that increasingly place expectations on marginalized groups to "adjust" to the very economic, social, and racial structures that marginalize them.

Some participants found guidance and emotional validation by being in community with other Portlanders of color who shared similar experiences. Victoria (44, Black/African, woman), originally from central Africa, expressed that Portland felt "very strange" compared to

Washington D.C. where she previously lived before moving to Portland. She described D.C. as "a big city with a lot of Black people- people there don't stare or care what you do. Here in Portland is different. It's very, very strange and I had to learn". For immigrants of color like Victoria who were not socialized early in life within the U.S. racial hierarchy, friendships with Black Americans helped her learn to cope with and recognize the salience of race in her and her children's lives. Victoria has a 9-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son who she worries have been "damaged" by growing up in the U.S. and in Portland:

> For me, I was lucky that I found people here who could teach me how to navigate the system here. I have a community of African American women. So now if my daughter is punished and sent home from school or my son is stopped by the police I can say, oh I know this is racism. I have a group of people who can walk me through these situations. These skills are important here specially if you have children. Once the child is damaged psychologically from being in this country you can't fix it anymore.

Victoria's perspective is particularly unique because she was born and raised in central Africa- a largely racially homogenous place she said "filled her with pride as a Black African woman". It was not until Victoria connected with a group of African American women who were born and raised in the U.S. that she was able to learn "the system", or, the U.S. racial hierarchy in which she and her children are ensnared. She describes the ability to recognize racism as a necessary skill for raising Black children in Portland and in the United States. For Victoria, lacking these skills may lead to irreversible emotional damage.

POC-only groups also serve as key affirming spaces where Portlanders of color can feel like their perceptions of reality are, in fact, real. The knowledge that others have had similar experiences with race may alleviate self-blame and sheds light on unequal power dynamics that produce racial gaslighting. Daisy (39, Iranian American, woman) discussed the importance of POC-only spaces, but also questions the conditions that create a need for them in the first place:

Part of the importance of these [POC] groups is we can openly talk about race and how that shows up in our lives here. And it feels good to be affirmed about the reasons why I often don't want to talk with white people about race. That's not just something I'm making up in my head. I think we should also consider racism like racial abuse. We talk a lot of about sexual abuse and harassment, and race is a bit different but it's also still kind of the same, we just don't talk about it in the same way. Racism is abuse. And we should be more concerned with this level of emotional and psychological abuse. The validation that you need here means like we shouldn't be abused in the first place. That's why when we get together it feels so good.

Daisy identifies parallels between sexual abuse and racial abuse. In coercive interpersonal relationships, gendered power dynamics draw upon notions of feminized irrationality to weaken the credibility of women (Littlejohn 2013; Sweet 2019). Daisy seems to argue that racial power dynamics can also produce similar emotional and psychological outcomes that diminish the credibility of people of color who live in a racialized society. For Daisy, getting together with other people of color "feels so good" because it serves as a reminder that racialized emotions are not isolated feelings, but a patterned material group experience (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Lara (23, Colombian American, woman) also felt alone in her discomfort until receiving validation from friends after they visited Portland for the first time:

At first a lot of my friends back home [in Miami] thought I was being really dramatic when I would tell them that I'm usually the only person of color most places I go in Portland and the language I'd use to talk about being brown, my Miami friends were not used to so they'd be like "yo, calm down, it's not that deep." And then they come here to visit and be like "ohhhh. I see what you're talking about now". So now my friends from home are more sympathetic with me and can talk about it with me which feels good.

Lara's friends in Miami downplayed her claims about Portland's pervasive whiteness until they experienced it for themselves. She mentions that they had little reference point for what it feels like to be "the only person of color", which is likely not an everyday experience in a racially diverse city like Miami. This demonstrates how place and demographics shape the emotions of racialized groups. Others like Tashi (34, Tibetan American, woman) found solace listening to a

podcast produced by Portlanders of color about the politics of race, class, and food in the city.

She mentioned that their critical conversations made about these topics her feel "not as crazy":

> I listen to the podcast Racist Sandwich which talks about issues of race and food and culture in Portland and hearing the conversations on that podcast make me feel not as crazy when I'm feeling very isolated. Because every weekend it's the same onslaught if I want to go out anywhere you know, like "where are you from? Are you from here? What languages do you speak? Wow you are Tibetan? Are you a Buddhist?" It can really make you feel crazy.

Tashi felt fatigued from dealing with racial microaggressions in her everyday life. Like others, she is aware of the that these dynamics make her feel "crazy" and "very isolated", yet this awareness does not make her emotions any less real. Tashi was not the only participant to mention the Racist Sandwich podcast as a source of comfort and validation; two other participants discussed the podcast positively. The Racist Sandwich is a Portland- based podcast founded in 2016 by Soleil Ho and Zahir Janmohamed. Ho is a chef and food journalist and Janmohamed is a writer; both are Portland transplants who created the podcast to cast light on issues of food, race, class, and culture. They discuss issues ranging from whiteness in the Portland restaurant scene, cultural appropriation, and showcase interviews with many Portland-based restaurateurs, chefs, entrepreneurs, and cultural critics of color. Media that centers the experiences and perspectives of Portlanders of color may play a key role in mitigating the damaging and isolating effects of everyday and internalized racism. Perhaps part of healing the emotional wounds inflicted by race and racism is simply being reminded that the pathology lies in the racialized social environment, not the racialized individual who must live in it. It is important to note that the participants highlighted here and many others I interviewed came to realize that the problem was not them, which helped relieve those cycles of self-blame and articulate those experiences to me during the interview. Racial gaslighting is an important aspect

of ambient racism because it describes dimensions of racism that are felt, but often difficult to name.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the emotional dimensions of racial life among Portlanders of color. Participant narratives about race were imbued with emotions, which many attributed to the overwhelmingly white demographic landscape of Portland. The perception that Portland is a progressive city also contributed to feelings of alienation and disillusionment among participants, especially for transplants who came to realize that the racial realities of Portland were misaligned with its public image as a progressive city. At the same time, the threat of active white nationalists in the area instilled fear among some respondents and contradicts Portland's liberal reputation. These social forces had profound consequences for participants' sense of safety, comfort, community-building, and the amount of emotional labor required to get through an average day. Portland's purported progressivism and covert forms of racism led some to doubt the validity of their own feelings and intuition, which intensified their emotional struggles. While the participants I spoke to had a range of life experiences and intersecting identities, the power of race in their lives was profoundly salient.

As a conceptual link between racial structures and racialized emotions, I introduce the concept of *ambient racism,* which describes how legacies of racism are embedded in the social infrastructure that racialized people navigate and emotionally contend with daily. While we know that the "racialized social system" affects individuals (Bonilla-Silva 1997), this article highlights *how* it diffuses into the micro-worlds of racially subordinated individuals, including their thoughts, anxieties, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions. Ambient racism is not simply about demographic underrepresentation, but rather, a consequence of *who* holds power, who is

visible/invisible, and whose "bodies are in/out of place" (Combs 2019). Ambient racism complicates dichotomies of structural and individual racism by showing how social structures do not only produce observable disparities, but also permeate the individual emotional worlds of racialized people.

Even though the racial dynamics highlighted in this chapter are not limited to Portland, interviews reveal distinct emotions associated with living and working in a city with a high proportion of whites. As such, participant experiences were deeply entrenched in the particularities of Portland's regional racial formation as a white metropolis. Even though the data presented in this chapter paints a somewhat dreary picture of POC experiences in Portland, it is important to note that many participants I interviewed also identified aspects of the city they appreciate. While race was salient in their lives, it did not entirely define their experience in the city. For example, Lan (34, Vietnamese, woman) noted, "Portland nature is so beautiful and at times I feel calm and peaceful here". Denise (42, Black, woman) said, "Despite its problems, there are aspects of Portland that fit my interests. I love biking. I love trees and I love that people here actually care about the environment. I think it fits my lifestyle, but not necessarily all of my values." Jasmine (32, Iranian American and Japanese American, woman) said: "I feel I chose a good place to live despite how exhausting it is […] I love Portland but I just don't feel like Portland loves me back". Those who were born and raised in Portland had sentimental attachments to the city. Daniel (24, Mexican American, man) noted, "Even though Portland has its problems, it's home". Similarly, Cindy (24, Vietnamese American, woman) said, "Portland is where my family and community are and I think it would be hard to leave". These quotes highlight some participants' complicated relationship to the city and remind us that many people of color have strong attachments to Portland despite their struggles there.

In the following chapter, I turn my focus toward participant perceptions of Portland itself. I analyze respondent's perceptions of the city's public image and address Portland's multiple contradictions, between progressivism and overt white supremacy, diversity and exclusion, and what it means to live in a purportedly "welcoming", "sustainable" city. Rather than placing analytical focus on the emotions of individual Portlanders of color, I ask: What is it about Portland that contributes to emotions highlighted in this chapter? What experiences do participants have with overt and covert racism?

CHAPTER III: "THE PROGRESSIVE JIM CROW SOUTH"

"If Portland is so progressive then why am I scared of Neo Nazis when I walk out my front door?" -Kristina (23, Black and Mexican American, woman)

"You know that whole "Keep Portland weird" slogan? I feel like whenever I hear that I hear "Keep Portland white." – Tashi (39, Tibetan American, woman)

Portland is considered one of the most politically progressive cities in the United States due its left-leaning voting patterns, sustainable infrastructure, and cultural openness (Abbott 2001; Burke and Jeffries 2016; McClintock 2018; Oregon Values and Beliefs Survey 2013). The city's unofficial slogan, "Keep Portland Weird" conveys the message that Portland is a welcoming place to "come as you are". However, the perspectives of Black and communities of color paint a more complicated picture as the city struggles to reckon with its racial past and present. This long-running tension bubbled to the surface during the summer of 2020, in which a months-long uprising against systemic racism and police violence took place, alongside subsequent clashes between anarchists, white supremacists, federal agents, and the police (Levinson and Olmos 2020). These events are reflective of the complex, multi-layered dimensions of racial life in Portland.

This chapter documents the multiple and seemingly contradictory dimensions of racism experienced by communities of color in this politically complex region. I address discrepancies between Portland's reputation as a liberal stronghold and the realities of racism felt by communities of color, demonstrating how overt and covert racism overlap, operating in tandem. I argue that overt and covert racism are not mutually exclusive, because both are rooted in a "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva 1997) that make up the totality of racisms experienced

by communities of color. While scholars have conceptualized the relationship between overt and covert racism (Bonilla-Silva 1997; 2003; Golash-Boza 2016; Omi and Winant 2015; Yeakey 1979), this chapter draws upon empirical data that illustrates *how* seemingly distinct forms of racism are experienced and understood by racially marginalized groups in a regionally specific context. One participant described Portland as the "Progressive Jim Crow South" because of experiences she had dealing with the combined effects of overt racism, institutional discrimination, microaggressions, and racialized undercurrents of liberal "niceness". Although the notion of a Progressive Jim Crow South might seem counterintuitive, a closer examination reveals how purportedly progressive spaces create conditions for multiple forms of racism to flourish, making up the broader social context through which ambient racism operates. While the previous chapter focused on the emotional dimensions of racism, this chapter highlights the concrete experiences of communities of color in Portland that shape emotions and ambient racism. I document how racially marginalized groups make sense of Portland's racial contradictions, including the city's ties to white supremacist groups and simultaneous reputation for liberal friendliness.

The presence of overt white supremacy in Portland is not only a remnant of the past, but a reflection of contemporary white supremacist movement-building in the region (Burley and Ross 2019). Because of this, participants shared deep concerns about the presence of "stealth" white supremacists blending in with the general community. The threat of white supremacist violence is an inescapable reality for communities of color in Portland despite the city's progressive politics. This looming threat- and moments when the threat manifests as reality- make up one aspect of the ambient "maze" of racisms that Black, Indigenous, and people of color navigate in the region. There are also moments when aspects of Portland's progressive culture clash with the

realities of overt white supremacy. Ironically, Portland's purported progressivism reinforces the complex emotional toll of racism, especially because the city's liberal public image does not match with the lived realities of communities of color. This disconnect may manifest in the lives of individuals as microaggressions, empty appeals to diversity, and awkward, dehumanizing encounters with whites.

In particular, multiple respondents expressed skepticism about liberal "niceness" and microaggressions that seem to permeate mainstream culture in Portland. Some observed a disconnect between the stated values and actions of self-proclaimed liberals, which contributed to a looming sense of discomfort and distrust. Some respondents even shared that they prefer to deal with more overt forms of racism because they are easier to identify and avoid. The perspectives of racially marginalized groups reveal dimensions of racism that are often difficult to document and articulate, especially in seemingly progressive contexts. This chapter details the spectrum of racisms experienced by BIPOC in Portland, which make up the totality of racisms encompassed by ambient racism. Indeed, Portland's progressive image is punctured by the city's longstanding place as a white supremacist stronghold and more recent place in the public eye as a site of contemporary racial reckoning. The Portlandia stereotype may hold true for many white Portlanders, but the lived experiences of Portlanders of color tell a different story.

"They're Here Among Us": White Supremacy Hiding in Plain Sight

Although Portland is often praised for its liberal credentials, it is also a stronghold for white supremacist groups such as neo Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacist skinheads, and recent manifestations of white supremacy such as The Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer, and others. While white supremacy has enduring historical foundations in the city, the Trump era

71

ushered in a "white nationalist resurgence", inspiring hate groups to act upon their beliefs. In

2020, hate crimes and bias incidents in Oregon increased 366 percent (Oregon Department of

Justice 2020). There are also growing anxieties among participants about white supremacists

"blending in" with Portland's white majority. These anxieties are not only tied to the threat of

white supremacist violence itself, but also the stress of not knowing whether the person sitting

next to you on the bus is a friendly hippie or a Nazi sympathizer. These dual realities create a

complicated racial landscape in which Portlanders of color navigate the combined risk of overt

racist attacks and covert, "friendly" racism simultaneously. These forms of racism are not

mutually exclusive; sometimes they join forces in insidious ways. Alex (49, Black, woman),

described Portland as the "Progressive Jim Crow South":

> I will stress that I wasn't raised here. I wasn't socialized here, and what I have is a fear for brown children because they're being socialized in an area to believe that they are less than. I like to call it the Progressive Jim Crow South, which doesn't make any sense whatsoever. The first time I wrote that down, I was like, this doesn't make sense, but the more that I'm here, oh my goodness, I'm like yes it is a progressive Jim Crow South. Just because we don't have signs that say "water fountain for white people", it feels the same…But also, in the roots of this place is something, I don't know if it's in the water, you know, people are in a psychological stand-still. So when you have the most seemingly progressive white people who are like 'that's not really a problem, or that's not really about race' or don't recognize race as an issue here, it blows my mind.

Alex refers to the ambient character of racism in Portland by describing as something "in the

roots of this place" and like there is something "in the water". This conveys how Portland's

racial history and power structure permeates the lives of people of color, while the city does little

to reckon with its racial past and present. I asked Alex if she could share an example of what she

meant by the Progressive Jim Crow South. She recounted a time when she found a noose

hanging from a car's rearview mirror in an organic grocery store parking lot in Northeast

Portland. Alex recalled:

I was heading into the Natural Grocers with my family to get those free-range organic eggs that everyone speaks so highly of. Then, my wife is like "do you see it?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I see it" And there's this full size noose hanging from a car window, and I was like holy shit. What are we going to do about this? So I walked into every business nearby asking people if they own a Hyundai until I come across the manager [a white woman] of the Natural Grocers and she's like "yeah that's my car". At this point I was like, you've got to me kidding me! You have a noose literally hanging from your car! And she was honest and said "Well I'm proud of it. My friend taught me how to make it and you're the only person to make it about race. It's not about race". I was floored. Of course, I was the dumb person who went looking for the person who had a noose hanging in their car. I'll own that… But this is what I mean when I say this place can make you coo coo for coco puffs.

Alex shared a detailed description about what transpired after the incident, which cannot be included in this dissertation for confidentiality reasons. Alex's story encompasses an apparent contradiction between Portland's progressive image and the city's enmeshment with overt forms of white supremacy. One might not expect to see symbols of overt white supremacy in an organic grocery store parking lot in one of the most purportedly progressive cities in the U.S., yet, Alex's experience highlights how white supremacy and Portland "progressivism" often live under the same roof. Perhaps this is what Alex means when she calls Portland the "Progressive Jim Crow South". Further, the manager's denial that the noose had anything to do with race invokes racial gaslighting- the process in which people of color who respond to racism are blamed for "making it about race" (Davis and Ernst 2019). For Alex, it was not the noose *per se*, that makes her feel "coo coo for coco puffs", but rather, the manager's renunciation of its racial meaning and disregard for the emotional impact the symbol has on Black Americans and other people of color. It is also important to note that this incident occurred in a gentrifying, historically Black neighborhood along Martin Luther King Boulevard in Northeast Portland. Even though the Black share of the population in this neighborhood decreased significantly since the 1990's due to gentrification, it is still a hub of Black culture, activism, and history in Portland (Burke and Jeffries 2016). Thus, the manager's response is also indicative of an ahistorical

"frontier" mindset (Smith 1996) that accompanies gentrification, in which non-Black residents who live and work in historically Black gentrified areas fail to account for the history, social, and cultural context of the neighborhood (Hyra 2017). Even if the organic grocery store manager displaying a noose in her car was not intended to invoke racial trauma, the historical weight of the symbol profoundly impacts surrounding community members.

Other respondents discussed concerns about white supremacists "blending in" with the rest of the population. Barbara (49, Japanese American, woman) pointed out common misconceptions about age and racism. She observed that many Portland transplants are white millennials, but not all are progressive, noting: "I feel like there's not only one type of white millennial that you see here, but also white supremacists who are young. They're here among us. Just because somebody is young does not mean they're not racist. You can't just say old white people are like this, young white people are too and I know they are here." Daisy (39, Iranian American, woman) also shared concerns about the presence of "stealth" white supremacists:

> I have a lot of fear, and I'm so sorry for whatever your family experienced [referring to the war in Vietnam], but I have a fear that at any time Iran will be the next in line for heavy warfare, which brings me a lot of anxiety. I didn't understand when I was younger that Oregon is a hub of neo nazis so there is a fear of living here when it comes to everyday life for people of color. I also think neo Nazis and the KKK have transformed over time. Before they had apparel to distinguish themselves, but now they may look like everyday people. These people have always been around in Oregon, but now I think we're more aware of it and they could be wearing ordinary clothes in ordinary jobs and that is anxiety- provoking. I could be out in public, living my life and these people could be everywhere, and they're full of hate and sometimes they're armed!

Daisy connects her (and my) racial heritage to American wars abroad. As an Iranian American she understands her racialized lived experience as shaped by orientalism- a key pillar of white supremacy anchored by war. As such, the "browning" of Iranian Americans as racialized others in the post 9/11 era emerges from orientalist dynamics in which "enemies" abroad become enemies "at home" (Magbouleh 2017). Given this vulnerability, Daisy worries about the

infiltration of white supremacists in everyday spaces. Respondents' fears are legitimate. In 2018, The Southern Poverty Law Center ranked Oregon in the top ten nationally for its hate group- to-population ratio (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018). According to the Oregon National Socialist Movement website, "ghost skins" are white supremacists who intentionally try to blend in with broader society in order to infiltrate mainstream spaces. Their webpage, titled, "How to Be a Ghost Skin" states: "Ghost Skins don't shave their heads, wear boots, braces or anything else that can visually identify them as Nazis. We strive to blend into society to be unrecognizable to the enemy" (Wayback Machine Archive). Further, the "Alt-right"- a white supremacist conservative movement uses terms like "culture" as substitutes for more divisive terms such as "white power" and "race," to promote "Western Civilization" as a code word for white culture or identity (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018). Members of the Alt-right typically dress in conventional clothing and avoid explicit white supremacist language and symbols touted by neo-Nazis. This repackaging of white supremacy allows members of extremist groups to blend in with the landscape, which adds to the ambient anxieties of communities of color in Portland.

Kristina (23, Black and Mexican American, woman) pointed out how these anxieties are also connected to a lack of trust in city leaders to quell white supremacist organizing:

> I think the other issue is when the Patriot Prayers guys came into Portland last year that was a huge problem because the mayor was basically like "yeah there's people of color in this city who feel unsafe but we have to let this group cross the river anyway' because that's their right." And the police let them. There was a lady being chased by a guy with a knife during that protest and the police didn't do anything. I get texts and Facebook updates all the time that tell me when the neo Nazis are out in town, so some days I can' t even leave my house. I'm scared for my life. But they don't care! If Portland is so progressive then why am I scared of neo Nazis when I walk out my front door?

Rightfully so, Kristina questions Portland's progressivism in light of the fact that she fears white supremacists when she leaves her home. In the "Progressive Jim Crow South", purportedly progressive city leaders may publicly condemn white supremacy, yet, Kristina and other

Portlanders of color have little faith they will be safe. Kristina's comment relates closely to Jen's

earlier earthquake metaphor (pg. 41), comparing racism in Portland to a structurally unsound

building. When public officials and the Portland police do little to address far-right and white

supremacist violence in the city, those who are disproportionately targets of that violence are left

to fend for themselves. Kristina's narrative reminds us that white supremacist violence is not

only constituted by the violent acts themselves, but also the victim's knowledge that the

individuals, groups, and institutions in their surroundings may not protect them. This often-

overlooked aspect of racism contributes to the cumulative impact of ambient racism,

demonstrating how seemingly progressive places can also create the conditions for overt racism

to thrive. Lara (23, Colombian American, woman) articulated similar concerns and described the

dual presence of "Portland weirdness" and neo-Nazis like a horror movie:

> I remember when I first told my friends in Miami that I was moving to Portland and there's this movie called Green Room about some kids who go to a punk show and end up getting trapped by Nazis and my friends told me its' going to be like in that movie if I moved to Portland. They were like, you're moving *there*?! I watched the movie and I was like holy shit this is super scary. It's so real, it's scary, and the movie takes place in Oregon. It made me scared to go to shows. So my friends had that immediate association with Portland and then of course there's Portlandia, which seems like two extremes because you often see the Portlandia side which is all about being weird and quirky and then what you don't often see is there's Nazi punk white supremacists, so this place is very confusing.

Even though *Green Room* is a fictional film that takes place in Oregon, it reinforces Lara's

existing anxieties about neo-Nazis infiltrating everyday spaces. Like a horror story, Lara

recognizes that the Portland "weirdness" may also function to obscure a more sinister side of the

city.

The perspectives and lived experiences of Portlanders of color dispel common narratives

that paint the city as a place that espouses freedom of expression and progressive ideals. The

ambient threat of white supremacist violence constrains BIPOC Portlanders' ability to express

themselves and be "at ease" in the city. Portland's progressive image is not necessarily

antithetical to its white supremacist roots, but rather, veils it from the naked eye. As Alex

mentioned, even though there are no longer laws enforcing segregation or second class

citizenship for people of color, the "roots" of Portland create contemporary conditions that make

it *feel* like a Progressive Jim Crow South. Unfortunately, ambient threats in this context can

occasionally come to fruition in the form of overt racism.

Overt Racism and Harassment

Direct experiences with overt racism demonstrate one of many dimensions of racism

experienced by people of color in Portland. Overt racism includes direct harassment, physical

threats/attacks, the use of racial slurs, explicitly racist language, and blatant discrimination. In

these acute moments of vulnerability, racialized people are reminded of their place in the racial

hierarchy. These encounters also require victims to make quick decisions about how to respond

(or not respond) to harassment and direct confrontation (Feagin 1991). Although less common

than covert forms of racism (i.e. microaggressions, etc.), eight participants shared anecdotes

about overt racism they and their loved ones experienced in Portland and in surrounding areas.

While painful, most described these encounters as an occasional "part of life" in the Pacific

Northwest. For example, Michelle (36. Multiracial Black, woman)- who has one white parent

and one Black parent- shared an early memory of racist harassment that shaped the way she

responds to racism as an adult:

> I remember as a kid driving with my parents a bit outside of town and my dad had this
> big Chevy Blazer and it was really loud, had big tires. Me and my brother were in the
> back seat, my parents in the front seats and some man, probably a white supremacist,
> drove by and yelled the word "n***** lover!" and I knew that word was bad, but I'll
> never forget the feeling I had in my chest of someone cut me deep, they yelled at me and
> my family. I remember my dad's response which was "Yo mama!" My dad was that

funny Black guy that was friends with everybody. His response was to be funny about it, so in some way I guess that was how I learned to deal with direct racism since it happens from time to time.

Michelle learned to deal with blatant anti-black racism using humor and immediate verbal retorts

Of course, choosing a response to direct racism requires "careful situation assessments" (Feagin 1991) such that the cost of confrontation does not pose greater risk to the victim(s). This was the case with Daniel (23, Mexican American, man) who also shared a frightening childhood experience:

> When I was in middle school some college age people moved into our apartment complex. They were white. This was the first time I remember experiencing like in-your-face racism. One of their bikes got stolen in the back and I was really scared they would think that we [him and his siblings] stole their bike. Then one night sure enough one of the guys, the new neighbor, came outside our window shouting "you stole my bike!" and was saying all these racist names for Mexicans. He even smashed a bottle on our window. It was wild. I was really scared because we couldn't do anything, at that time my parents were not legal residents so I was scared they would call the cops and of course I didn't feel comfortable calling the cops because my parents didn't have their papers.

By casting him as a bike thief, Daniel's aggressors drew upon racialized assumptions of Latinos as "perpetually inferior" and predisposed to criminality (Lacayo 2017; Vasquez 2011). Daniel withdrew from the confrontation because he was constrained by the threat of deportation due to his parents' undocumented status, demonstrating how structural vulnerabilities, group racialization, and circumstantial contexts shape second-generation children of immigrants' experiences of discrimination (Waters and Kasinitz 2010). Minh (34, Vietnamese, woman) also discussed direct harassment her dad experienced after a minor car accident in town:

> My dad doesn't speak English at all and he was driving somewhere in town, and a car hit him from behind, and the guy, a white guy, driving it wanted to call the police on my dad because he didn't speak English. Of course my dad did not want that to happen, and so he calls me to see if I can speak to the guy, and in the background I hear the man yelling at my dad "You should just go back to your country! You stupid people, you don't know how to drive! You don't know who you're messing with!" I was so furious, and I told my dad "just stay right there, I'm coming and I'll be right there with you". Of course the guy

was gone by the time I got there. I just felt so humiliated and helpless, because that guy didn't know anything about my dad and treated him like he's not a human. I just cried. All I could do was cry.

Similar to Daniel's encounter, Minh's dad's harasser drew upon group-specific stereotypes as a form of intimidation- namely, racialized categorizations of Asians as bad drivers and perpetual foreigners who should "go back to their country". Even though this incident caused feelings of anger, pain, and helplessness, Minh planned on directly confronting her dad's harasser to recuperate their sense of dignity after a dehumanizing experience. Overt racism and the visible (and invisible) presence of white supremacists in the region constitute one of many dimensions of ambient racism experienced by people of color in Portland. While the threat of blatant racial harassment is ever-present, covert racism, including microaggressions, were also common modes of racism experienced by respondents.

Microaggressions

Although overt racism produces specific and often frightening moments of vulnerability, the effects of more subtle forms of racism accumulate over time, leading to mental, emotional, and physical strain for marginalized groups (Feagin 1991; Pierce 1988; Solorzano et al. 2009). Racial microaggressions are seemingly subtle racial slights that elicit cumulative emotional wounds (Solorzano et al. 2009) Sue (2010) describes microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership." (24) These exchanges can be verbal, such as a passing comments or unwanted questions (i.e. "Your English is good", "Where are you from?") or physical, such as staring, gawking, and physical avoidance (i.e. moving seats on the bus). Often times, people who engage in microaggressions are unaware of their impact. Indeed, "Many Whites fail to realize that

people of color from the moment of birth are subjected to multiple racial microaggressions from the media, peers, neighbors, friends, teachers, and even in the educational process and/or curriculum itself." (Sue 2010: 7). Nonetheless, the emotional burden and the stress of how to respond to microaggressions contribute to the omnipresent, cumulative nature of ambient racism. Microaggressive encounters are more common in contexts where subordinated groups have frequent contact with dominant groups (Sue 2010). As a result, Portland's overwhelmingly white racial makeup and violent racial history makes the city a minefield of racial microaggressions that people of color must navigate with vigilance (Matsumoto 2020). As such, the "micro" dimensions of microaggressions can be traced back to historical regional, racialized, gendered, and class-based structures of oppression that come alive in the everyday experiences of people of color in the "Progressive Jim Crow South".

The majority of respondents described experiences with microaggressions. Most occurred in the workplace, school, social gatherings, and public places such as churches, concerts, restaurants, and on the street. One of the most common microaggressions reported by respondents was staring. Staring is a micro-aggressive behavior because regardless of the "starers" intentions, it invokes a sense of discomfort and surveillance among those being "watched". Barbara (49, Japanese American, woman)- a transplant from Los Angeles- and avid country music fan, described uncomfortable experiences she's had at country music concerts in the Portland area:

> When I moved here level of awareness with race just went way up. Some incidences I can tell you about, for example, I like country music and often go out to concerts, like a county western concert because I like that music. But of course people wouldn't think Asians would be there, so I just get the most hostile looks from people like "What are you doing here?", "You do not belong here". They would just stare as if I couldn't see them staring. It was just so clear how unwelcoming it was.

For Barbara, the stares alone were enough to make her feel othered in the space. While country music scenes are known for pervasive whiteness (Mann 2008), Barbara did not notice similar dynamics while at concerts in Los Angeles. After moving to a predominantly white neighborhood in Southwest Portland, Diana (23, Mexican and Salvadoran American, woman) and her family were often stared at by white neighbors while on walks:

> Sometimes my family and I would be out walking around the new neighborhood in and we would speak in Spanish, and people around the neighborhood would stare at us a certain way, give a certain look, so you could kind of just feel the vibe of not feeling welcome there. We didn't have a close connection to that neighborhood at all.

Diana describes how neighbors' stares contributed to the overall unwelcoming "vibe" of their new neighborhood. As one of the few Latinx families in the neighborhood, Diana also suspects the staring could be related to her family speaking Spanish, which is often policed in white public spaces (Sanchez-Muñoz and Amezuca 2019). Daisy, a 34-year-old Iranian-American woman who is partnered with a Chinese American man, shared about their experiences being stared at while together in public:

> It's not just in white suburbs we get stares but if we go places like the beach, if we go to rural areas, or any environment where we're the only people of color around they stare at us. I notice that people stare at me but for whatever reason they really stare at him [Daisy's partner]. It's hard to tell if people were really staring at me, but I see it clearly with him. They really stare at him. Like we go to a restaurant and it just feels like everyone is staring. It's hard to pinpoint exactly why but it feels weird. It's probably because we're an interracial couple but either way it just feels eerie and bizarre. We feel like zoo animals or museum creatures like we're on display.

For Daisy and her partner, stares make them feel like an object of white people's curiosity. While it is impossible to know the "true" thoughts and intentions of starers, the dynamics described by Daisy are historically patterned. Scholars have conceptualized "racial voyeurism" as practices that treat race as a spectacle, especially in relation to black bodies and communities (Moss and Roberts 2020). These practices can be traced back to westward expansion and European

colonialism, in which live displays of colonial subjects became ritualized at World Fairs throughout Europe and North America. For instance, The 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland, Oregon included a range of amusements and concessions, including live displays of newly-colonized Philipinos, Native Americans in an "Indian Village", and live geisha displays as part of their Japanese Village exhibit (Trafford 2015). These practices situate nonwhite bodies as sites of amusement and curiosity in relation to white, Western civilization. Because Daisy and her partner are not Black, they are not subject to specific forms of anti-black racial voyeurism (Moss and Roberts 2020). However, their presence in white space and experiences with pervasive staring can be traced back to a broader legacy of racialized practices that normalize the surveillance and display of racialized bodies. In this sense, the "micro" dynamics inherent to microaggressions are entrenched in macro-level historical processes that shape the everyday experiences of people of color.

Other common types of microaggression were intrusive compliments, questions, and seemingly friendly remarks couched in racially coded meanings. Otherwise known as "discrimination with a smile" (Bonilla-Silva 2003), these types of microaggressions send subtle messages about race, belonging, and power. Cindy (22, Vietnamese American, woman) shared an experience she had while at a restaurant with friends:

> I did make friends with some of the few nonwhite people in my high school, one was Lebanese and the other was African American and we all went out to dinner in North Portland one time. This white lady came up to us and was like "you are such a beautiful group of friends". I was like, I know why you're saying that, that's awkward. So stuff like that happens a lot in Portland and it's just weird. I think she was thinking we looked exotic because it's so strange in Portland to see a group of people out and about who are not white she just had to approach us and comment on it and she was clearly confident enough to do so.

While the white woman's compliment was seemingly friendly, Cindy understood this encounter as racialized and intrusive. Victoria (44, Black/African, woman) also spoke about an eerie

"friendliness" that permeated interactions in her predominantly white workplace. When I asked

what her interactions were like with white coworkers, Victoria responded:

> Oh, very, very strange. They would smile at me very strangely, thinking they were being friendly. They would smile a little too long. Then the same people would complain about your every single move at work. All these little passive aggressive stuff, like if I missed a day because I had to stay home with my daughter who is sick, they talk about "oh why is she not here, why is she not at work?". It was very strange. I had one white woman send me thirty emails in one day asking me to do the same thing in thirty different ways. It felt like harassment, I was like, are you my parent? It was very very strange. And when I say hi back to them, they would not look at me. They would not look me in the eye, face to face. Wow, it was just strange...I could feel it in my body, this pain and uneasiness when I left that job. It's a very strange place to be as a person of color. Very very strange place to be.

Victoria describes what "discrimination with a smile" *feels* like. According to Victoria, her

coworkers' smiles do not match up with their behaviors, which creates an insidious work

environment. These workplace experiences reflect how "nice" white people may participate in

organizational dynamics that contribute to the surveillance and denigration of Black employees

(Ray 2019; Wingfield 2007). As one of the few employees of color in a white organizational

space, Victoria represents a "body out of place" (Combs 2019), rendering her vulnerable to

othering and surveillance. The cumulative stress caused by these microaggressive dynamics

manifested as physical pain, which Victoria became fully aware of only after leaving the job.

Michelle (36, Multiracial Black, woman) also described dynamics in her previous workplace that

seemed friendly on the surface, but invoked racialized, gendered stereotypes about Black

women:

> The president of the institution I used to work for would often call me "trouble". That was his nickname for me. So whenever he'd see me he'd say "Oh, there's trouble" in a kind of playful way. And he did this all the time. And then I learned it wasn't just me, it was many of the Black women that worked there he called "trouble". So you begin getting this complex of like, what am I doing, so that when he sees me he sees "trouble"? And why is this a word he only seems to use for Black women?

While seemingly playful, labeling Black women like Michelle "trouble" in a professional workplace setting sends racialized gendered messages that invoke controlling images such as the "angry" or disruptive black woman. "Trouble" may also be connected to deep-seated constructions of the hypersexual Black woman- an image that conjures the curiosities and temptations of white men (Collins 1990). Although it's unclear exactly what the university administrator meant while calling Black women subordinates "trouble", these microaggressions led Michelle to question and blame herself. Michelle's experience conveys one of the more insidious aspects of microaggressions, which is not necessarily tied to the encounter itself, but the aftermath in which the victim is left to process the muddled meanings and intentions behind the interaction. Because these encounters are often couched in smiles, playful tones, and "niceness" it becomes especially difficult to make sense of the harm that was caused. Relatedly, participants like Roger (29, Chinese American, man) shared skepticism about Portland "niceness":

> There are a lot of suspiciously friendly people I've come across in Portland. It feels like every time I try to engage or open up [with white people] it always goes weird. I don't know if this happens to you but it's like do you always want to talk to me about some Asian-related thing? They won't start with that, like they'll start the conversation normal and friendly but the sooner or later they'll be like "what's your favorite Asian market in town to go shopping?" When white people get drunk its worse. Last week I had a guy at a party come up to me to tell me about all the Asian girlfriends he's had…Like why do you have to come up and say that to the only Asian person in the room?

Similar to Victoria's comment about white coworkers who smile "a little too long", Roger's experiences led him to question "suspiciously friendly" people in Portland. This distrust stems from a pattern of microaggressive dynamics in which seemingly "normal", friendly interactions devolve into intrusive, racialized comments and questions that revolve around Roger's "Asianness". These micro-level encounters are indicative of enduring, macro-level gendered and racialized constructions of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, sexual objects, and exotic

amusements (Chou and Feagin 2016). Microaggressions imbue casual interactions with racial meaning such that the victim feels continually defined by their racial embodiment. Soojin (42, Korean American, woman) also shared how seemingly "nice" interactions with whites can carry racial undercurrents:

> One time I was walking in the park and this very nice white guy walking his dog comes up to me smiling and asked me, "Oh where are you from?" That seems welcoming right? But also, I feel it is putting me into a place. That you must not be from here because this is "our" place and I am oblivious to the history of immigration from Asia. You're Asian so you must come from another country. I think that was his logic. So, this kind of thing may seem welcoming but with a question mark.

Soojin describes how microaggressions- especially those aimed at Asian Americans- contribute to foreigner racialization: a process by which Asian Americans are socially, politically, and culturally constructed as inherently foreign, unassimilable, and contingent threats to U.S. national identity (Fujiwara 2008). While well-meaning, questions like "Where are you from?" seem benign, they stem from an amalgam of political processes such as the history of anti-Asian immigration laws, the internment of Japanese Americans, American wars in Asia, and the anti-Japanese hysteria of the 1980's (Lee 2016; Ngai 2014). Despite widespread aspirations of living in a colorblind society, all Asian Americans' interactions and lived experiences occur within the shadow of this historical backdrop. Thus, Soojin and other Asian Americans are often "nicely" reminded that they do not belong. Overt racism, the looming threat of white supremacist violence, and microaggressions constitute the multiple layers of racism experienced by communities of color in Portland. These lived experiences informed respondents' complex perspectives about Portland's liberal reputation.

Perspectives on Portland From Within the Veil

Power dynamics and social location shape our interpretation of reality and "whose" versions of reality are deemed legitimate. Historically, white Eurocentric interpretations of reality predominate western culture (Ladson-Billings 2000). However, the perspectives of those on the margins may reveal deeper aspects of hegemonic culture (Collins 1990; hooks 2004). Du Bois' concept of the veil articulates how Black Americans must live both within and outside white dominated society (1903). On one hand, the veil shrouds the humanity, experiences, and worldviews of Black Americans from the white world. On the other hand, from behind the veil, racially marginalized individuals witness the "human drama from a veiled corner" (Du Bois 1920: 1) which grants them "second sight"- a heightened awareness of social relations that derive from lived experiences of marginality and a resulting wide-angle view of society.

As such, participants perspectives drew from their lived experiences within and outside what they perceive to be mainstream culture in Portland. Their testimonies and observations highlight aspects of racism that are seemingly contradictory, implicit, and hard to name unless they are experienced first-hand. Some even expressed that there are "two" versions of Portland: the Portland experienced by whites and the Portland experienced by people of color. They grappled with the contradictions inherent to Portland's liberal reputation in relation to their experiences living in the city as racialized individuals. For instance, Denise (42, Black, woman), a transplant from Los Angeles, explained how living in Portland changed her view of liberalism:

> I used to think liberal was like, you're on the right side of history, you get it, and you're *fo*r the cause, up to date, but I no longer think that about liberals, especially white liberals. So here in Portland, personal expression is very expected, people can walk around in pajama pants, blue hair, whatever and you don't get looked at twice. It's a pretty accepting place, but I experience it as accepting in that specific way…so I feel like with self-proclaimed white liberals, I'm always questioning, where are these racist skeletons in your closet that are being hidden? The biggest things that I see are microaggressions, all sorts of unintentional racism and just too much self-congratulation as well, like "Yeah I'm all for Black people" but not really understanding

what that means or educating themselves about the unique struggles of people of color that they claim to champion.

Denise identifies contradictions embedded in narratives around Portland liberalism and "weirdness". While Portland may be a safe place for individuals to express themselves through eccentric hairstyles and clothing, Denise understands this as a narrow criteria for liberal open-mindedness. She observes that the words and practices of self-proclaimed liberals often do not match up, which makes her cautious about hidden "racist skeletons in the closet". This sentiment reflects a broader anxiety circulating among respondents about hidden racism, which many feel bubbles just beneath surface of Portland's progressive image, but emerges through covert racism, microagressive encounters, and ambient racial dynamics that produce cumulative emotional harm. This is reminiscent of the horror film, *Get Out*, in which the protagonist, a Black man (Chris) joins his white girlfriend (Rose) to visit her parents in upstate New York. On the surface, all seems well. Her parents are friendly, accommodating, self-proclaimed liberals who claim they "would have voted for Obama for a third term" if they had the chance. As the weekend progresses, Chris begins to have strange interactions with Rose's parents and their African American domestic staff. He begins to feel a simmering uneasiness, and things turn dark. Chris is hypnotized by Rose's mother and later finds himself in the family home's basement, strapped to a chair. It is revealed that the family of Rose transplants Black people's brains into other people's bodies granting them preferred physical characteristics and a twisted form of immortality. *Get Out* captures the sinking feeling that there may just be "racist skeletons in the closet". Denise's perspective also highlights contradictions inherent to *postracialism-* a persistent ideology in the post-Civil Rights era in which the various practices that maintain racial hierarchy endure even in the face of a broad social repudiation of purposeful racial mistreatment. (Haney-

87

Lopez 2010: 1027). Statements that purport to repudiate racism abound in Portland. For instance, Alicia (30, Black, woman) pointed out the pervasiveness of Black Lives Matter signs in majority white, gentrified neighborhoods throughout the city:

> Here in Portland I see all of the Black Lives Matter signs posted everywhere but people being pushed out at the same time and Black people getting stares in those same neighborhoods. It looks like white people crossing the street to not walk on the same side you're walking on. Those little signs or flags that say "In our house" or "In this place everyone is welcome" or whatever. Yeah, all of those things where anybody can buy a sign and it makes them look like they're down with the cause but that doesn't necessarily mean they are…They don't want change to happen because that would ruin the white utopia they're consciously or unconsciously building here. I think of that all the time when people gripe about old Portland, like "Oh I miss old Portland', like yeah old Portland was good for some people but it wasn't good for a lot of people, so when you talk about the good old days, what are you actually saying?

Alicia describes how the lived experiences of Black Portlanders are at odds with the progressive and anti-racist messages communicated on yard signs. Indeed, bumper stickers and yard signs are a means to interject one's values into the urban space (Case 1992). However, Alicia understands these signs as a type of performative virtue signaling. She identifies a deep irony, observing the prevalence of Black Lives Matter signs in neighborhoods from which Black Portlanders have been serially displaced (Nguyen 2018). Despite their stated support for anti-racist ideals, Alicia understands self-proclaimed liberals as resistant to substantive change. This dynamic is consistent with the "principle-policy gap"- a widely observed disconnect between whites' support of racial ideals such as equality and diversity and their participation in practices that perpetuate racial inequality (Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017). Although Black Lives Matter yard signs signal support for anti-racism, Alicia's perspective reveals the dissonance between racial ideals and material outcomes in Portland. Derrick Bell (1992) conceptualizes this, arguing that many liberal whites will advocate for racial justice only when it is of little cost. Bell concludes that increasingly progressive racial attitudes among whites are not a solution to our

racial problems, but may signal a "regeneration of the problem in particularly perverse form" (3)

if not paired with antiracist practices and structural change. Daniel (23, Mexican American, man)

also discussed the Black Lives Matter sign phenomenon:

> There was a tweet going around saying that Black Lives Matter signs have replaced
> Black people in Portland and I think it's a good point. People can say they support the
> Black Lives Matter Movement and maybe they do, but they also might have pushed out a
> Black family based on where they live. Do they realize what they're doing? Are they
> thinking about that? Is it just for show? It's hard to know.

Like Alicia, Daniel feels that the Black Lives Matter signs in gentrified neighborhoods reflect a

disconnect between new residents' purported racial ideals and the racial histories of the

neighborhoods they live in. This is consistent with racialized dimensions of gentrification in

which incoming white and nonblack residents may possess a "historical amnesia", or lack of

recognition of the gentrified neighborhood's racial past. In their analysis of gentrified historically

Black neighborhoods in Nashville, Hightower and Fraser (2020) conclude: "It is precisely the

historical amnesia and silencing of racial injustices that has made gentrification possible" (240).

Historical amnesia also reveals a particular dimension of white privilege; unlike the Black and

Portlanders of color who experience the omnipresence of ambient racism, white newcomers

experience the privilege of not having to "feel" the weight of history rooted in racialized space.

For instance, longtime residents of color may feel grief when their communities are displaced by

a white majority and transplants of color may feel emotionally burdened by pervasive whiteness

upon their arrival to Portland. Because most whites do not share these experiences, the gentrified

neighborhood becomes a "blank slate" through which they can freely construct their cultural,

political, and social identities (Burke 2015; Smith 1996; Shaw and Sullivan 2011; Smith 1996;

Zukin 1987). While they relay a message of antiracism, Black Lives Matter signs also convey a

performative virtue signalling that distinguishes the white liberal middle-class from white

89

conservatives and overt racists (Hughey 2012). Although Black Lives Matter yard signs in

majority white gentrified neighborhoods are not harmful, they make up a broader context in

which Portland's history of racial exclusion and displacement clash with Portland's progressive

image. Thus, the relationship between Black Lives Matter signs and Black displacement reflect a

deeper schism, or "veil" (Du Bois 1903) that separate the worlds of whites from Black and other

communities of color.

Kristina (22, Black and Mexican American, woman) also spoke to this, and felt that

white Portlanders are out of touch with the realities of racism:

> The thing about Portland is that people in this city do not want to look at what's right in
> front of them. They don't want to realize or face the truth. If you're racist, then just
> acknowledge that. Don't say you're an ally when you're not. Don't say you're immigrant
> and refugee friendly and then go call the cops on people of color. Because for white
> people they don't have to worry about being in danger just by walking down the street or
> getting stopped by cops or anything. But they will say stuff like "Oh tell us about your
> experiences, fill out this form, we need the survey data for the diversity grant money" but
> it's like c'mon. Last I checked I'm not a dollar sign.

Like others, Kristina feels disillusioned by Portland's purported liberal friendliness. She

distinguishes between what (presumably white) people *say* and what they *do*, which fuels her

frustration. By saying that she feels like a "dollar sign", Kristina speaks to a feeling of

objectification central to "diversity as a commodity"- a tenet of diversity ideology in which

nonwhites are treated as objects for the benefit and satisfaction of whites (Mayorga-Gallo 2014).

The commodification of diversity allows dominant groups to publicly espouse the virtues

diversity while doing little to address patterns of inequality (Warikoo 2016; Woody 2020).

Crystal (34, Black, woman) used an analogy to describe these dynamics in the city of Portland as

a whole:

> I think for the most part Portland is trying to be progressive, but it kinda feels like one of
> those, ummm to use like a crazy analogy, you know when someone sees a dad with his
> child, like taking care of his child, interacting with his kid and the mother isn't present

90

and everyone's like "Oh my god look at that father, he's doing such a good job, he's so great!" and you know if you see a mom in the same circumstances it's just like "oh she's a mom". But with the dad it's like, this is basic, it's what he's supposed to do because he's a parent. I feel like Portland is like that, it's like "Look at me, look at what we're doing, look at us, we're so progressive." But it's like, well, that's what you're supposed to do. Diversity should be built into the policy, not an extra thing you're claiming to be doing to look good. And on top of that they are congratulating themselves for acknowledging systemic issues they created in the first place.

Crystal understands Portland's appeals to diversity and progressive ideals as only scratching the surface of entrenched inequalities. Her analogy apt; since patriarchy creates the conditions for a gendered division of labor within parenting, men who care for their children's basic needs are praised as doting fathers. Similarly, entrenched white supremacy and pervasive whiteness create the conditions through which even superficial appeals to diversity and racial justice are celebrated as ends in of themselves (Ahmed 2012). In each case, the structural foundations of inequality remain intact despite symbolic steps in the "right direction". Crystal's perspective reveals important "cracks" in Portland's progressive image.

Some respondents admitted that they prefer to deal with overt racism, rather than superficial appeals to diversity, microaggressions, and other forms of covert racism which may be more difficult to circumvent. I spoke to Claudia- a 24-year-old Mexican woman who grew up in Mexico City, but moved to the U.S. for college six years prior to our interview. She attended college in a small town in Indiana which she described as politically conservative and moved to Portland seven months before our interview to work for a nonprofit. Claudia shared that she felt more comfortable around people in the predominantly white conservative Indiana college town, because she observed that their politics and attitudes aligned more closely with their behaviors:

So I think what made it a little easier in Indiana was the fact that if someone is racist it's easier to tell, you can tell which types of people you'd want to avoid and they would avoid you as well. But here in Portland a lot of people believe that they're so woke and

very liberal and that they are not racist so a lot of the time I've gotten the most racist comments from people like that, then I get confused. Sometimes they try to be extremely nice which feels weird but perhaps because they haven't been exposed to people of color... It's definitely more comfortable for me being in Indiana talking to people because I know exactly what I'm getting myself into and know what to expect from them. In that sense I feel more control and it is predictable. Here I just feel like I'm always defensive because I don't know what they're gonna say next.

I asked Claudia if she could provide an example:

Yeah, so sometimes when I'm in a space where I'm meeting new people, they won't even introduce themselves or ask what my name is. Their first question is, well they look at me and they're like, "where are you from?" but in this tone of like, they can tell that I'm not from here because I have darker skin and have an accent. They make it very evident that I'm not from here or don't look like I'm from here. Last weekend I had this experience with a man who came to me at a church event and he said "I'm glad you're here because we need more diversity". Which was supposed to be a nice comment on his part, but made me feel really weird in how he said it. Because he never interacted with me before, he was a total stranger who just walked up to me, smiling. But the first thing he pointed out is that I'm "diverse". It feels kind of dehumanizing.

Ironically, whites' seemingly open-minded desire for interracial contact create awkward situations for people of color like Claudia. For this reason, she feels more in control of her interactions in contexts where whites tend to avoid interracial contact altogether. While Portland may feel like a minefield of racial hazards, conservative regions possess more-clearly demarcated "racial hazard zones", which Claudia knew to avoid. Jasmine (33, Iranian and Japanese American, woman) also compared her experiences with racism to predominantly white, politically conservative regions where she previously lived. She spent the majority of her life in a predominantly white, small city in the Midwest:

It's interesting because even though racism was more explicit in places I've lived in the Midwest, I felt like I had a better grasp on it and my mental health was a lot better when I was living there. And I think it's because you immediately know racism when you saw it. Here, it's different.

While encounters with overt racism are damaging and often frightening, Jasmine and Claudia's perspectives highlight how the "confusing" and nebulous nature of covert racism may be more

mentally distressing than overt forms of racism over time. As such, the perspectives and experiences of racially marginalized groups reveal less explicit, but equally harmful dimensions of racism that make Portland feel like a "Progressive Jim Crow South". Rachel (21, Mexican American, woman) described how popular depictions of the city are at odds with the lived experiences of people of color:

> Portland has different meanings for different people. So a lot of people see it portrayed as a liberal, accepting, healthy, easy going city, right? But at the same time me being a person of color and actually living here in the middle of it I don't see that. I see fake activism, I see white feminism, I see six dollar coffees, I see people who are not willing to follow through with what they say. I feel like Portland has almost two perspectives. The image it presents and how it's actually experienced by people of color who don't fit that image, people like me.

Cindy (22, Vietnamese American, woman) echoed this sentiment:

> I think at the end of the day there's two very different Portlands. There's the Portland you experience as a person of color and the Portland you experience if you're white and you get all the social passes and comfort that come with that.

Rachel and Cindy articulate how racial subject position shapes the experiential aspects of living in a place like Portland. They describe a duality in which whites and people of color live in disparate social realities. This social fissure, also known as the color line (Du Bois 1903), produces racialized emotions at the micro level and reflects broader racial histories and structures at the macro level. Indeed, racism operates more complexly than a duality, since distinct forms of racialization and other axes of inequality shape how the color line is experienced. However, all people of color in Portland experience the city in relation to its pervasive whiteness, which this chapter and the previous have documented. Ultimately, the feeling that there are "two Portlands" demonstrate how the same place can be experienced and understood in vastly different ways, depending on one's social location. This explains Alex's conceptualization of the Progressive Jim Crow South- a space in which two seemingly

93

contradictory realities overlap, and constitute the full sum of racisms experienced by Portlanders of color (ambient racism). When we take the insight of racially marginalized groups into account, complicated racial realities become visible from this opening in the proverbial veil.

Chapter Summary

This chapter documents participants' multiple experiences with racism, including overt harassment, microaggressions, and other forms of covert racism. These experiences are constitutive of ambient racism because they emerge from larger structural conditions that manifest as part of the everyday racialized environment in Portland. Overt racism and the threat of white supremacist violence may result in discrete and distressing encounters, while microaggressions such as staring, intrusive and racially-coded comments invoke repeated harm upon those targeted. This chapter also uncovers how participants understand Portland's many contradictions, demonstrating how seemingly progressive spaces also produce conditions for multiple forms of racism to thrive. While The Progressive Jim Crow South may seem paradoxical, it make sense when we understand the region through the experiences of racially marginalized groups.

Sociologists tend to discuss different forms of racism in isolation from one another, yet they are not *experienced* in isolation from one another. This chapter demonstrates how all of these forms of racism (structural, overt, covert, etc.) overlap and work together to affect the experiences and perspectives of Portlanders of color. In the course of one day, Portlanders of color may have to defend themselves against explicit racial harassment on the bus while commuting to work; once they get to work, they may have to deal with incessant microaggressions in their workplace. These interactions all take place within the broader

backdrop of Portland's historical, political, and structural formation as region designed to benefit whites (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Brooks 2004; Drew 2012). This multilayered experience constitutes life in the "Progressive Jim Crow South".

The next chapter details multiple forms of resistance practiced by participants who leveraged their agency to address racism and other forms of oppression in their lives. Ambient racism and its effects are not deterministic; they also stimulate the potential for social change. While Portland's structural and historical inequalities create conditions for multiple dimensions of racism to flourish, it also creates the conditions for individual and groups to cultivate empowerment, community-building, and material change.

CHAPTER IV

RESISTING AMBIENT RACISM: COMMUNITY, COOPERATION, AND
EMPOWERMENT

"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is
never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" - Michel Foucault

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political
warfare."- Audre Lorde

We cannot understand racism and other forms of oppression without also understanding

how individuals cope, resist, and thrive despite experiencing marginalization. Patricia Hill

Collins (1990) describes the mutually constitutive relationship between oppression and

resistance: "Oppression and resistance remain intricately linked such that the shape of one

influences that of the other." (292). Accordingly, participants resisted ambient racism in a variety

of ways which correspond to the multiple levels through which ambient racism operates (i.e.

structural, interactional, emotional, etc.). Ambient racism accounts for the ways macro-systems

come to shape the micro-level feelings and experiences of people of color, encompassing the

diffuse and cumulative effects of historical legacies of racism on local demographics and culture,

as well as the physical and symbolic space that racial actors inhabit. This means ambient racism

operates at the macro and micro-level simultaneously, shaping how individuals experience race

and place.

While ambient racism inflicts cumulative emotional harm, it also gives rise to multiple

forms of resistance and opportunities for subordinated groups to construct avenues for the

redistribution of material resources, community building, and personal empowerment.

Participant narratives demonstrate how resistance takes multiple forms, occurring along a

spectrum of actions taken in opposition to some exercise of power (Hollander and Einwhoner 2004), such as cultivating community spaces, redistributing economic resources, and establishing modes of self-definition. In this chapter, I draw upon Patricia Hill Collins' conceptualization of resistance as a complex interplay between empowerment, self-definition, and institutional transformation that respond to multiple domains of power (i.e. structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal). Much like Newton's Third Law of Motion, resistance represents an equal and opposite reaction to structural injustice.

To cope with the socially and emotionally alienating aspects of ambient racism and overwhelming demographic whiteness in Portland, some participants created and sought out BIPOC-only spaces and community groups. Many participants purposely spent time in Portland's more racially diverse neighborhoods in search of comfort. Because this study's sample is largely middle class and college-educated, many participants possessed forms of economic, cultural, and social capital that they utilized as a means to redistribute resources and "work the cracks" (Collins 1990) within white organizations (Ray 2019). I also document how Portlanders of color establish personal well-being, self-definition, and self-worth despite the power of ambient racism in their lives. By refusing to internalize dominant narratives about their socially situated identities, participants protected their mental health. As such, negative racialized emotions may also invoke "emotional resistance" (Vasquez and Norton-Smith 2015)- feelings, attitudes, and actions aimed at self-definition and the establishment of group worth. A refusal of dominant ideologies creates space for alternative, more empowering modes of thinking, feeling, and living. *Feeling good* and cultivating spaces free from racial violence were key to resisting ambient racism.

This chapter demonstrates how resistance is simultaneously material, collective, emotional, and deeply personal. Although ambient racism in Portland is pervasive, it does not fully define the complex experiences of minoritized groups in the city. Ambient racism is not a deterministic, totalizing social force that leads naturally to irreversible harm; rather, it also has the potential to stimulate agency and lasting change.

Community-Building and Diverse Spaces

One of the most common ways participants dealt with feelings of isolation, malaise, and fear associated with ambient racism was by cultivating and frequenting spaces where they did not feel minoritized. These spaces include meet-up and networking groups for Black and communities of color in Portland, recreational groups, and immigrant and POC-owned businesses located in more racially diverse parts of the city. These spaces are oases of respite from ambient racism in Portland. In order for marginalized groups to cultivate self-worth , "the members must have spaces where they can express themselves apart from the hegemonic or ruling ideology." (Collins 1990: 5). Being in these intentional spaces remove marginalized individuals from surveillance by more powerful groups and foster conditions for independent self-definitions. It also facilitates the formation of social ties that mobilize collective forms of resistance. In chapter II, I highlighted the multiple ways in which participants felt surveilled, othered, fetishized, and emotionally manipulated in relation to specific encounters and the overarching ambient character of racism in Portland. By seeking out spaces that were not majority white, participants described visceral feelings using phrases like, "sigh of relief," "breath of fresh air," "invigorating" and "safe haven." Knowing what feels comfortable also

means being conscious of what feels uncomfortable. Participants who sought out safe spaces that *feel good* chose not to normalize the emotional discomfort that emerges from ambient racism.

Tashi (39, Tibetan American, woman) shared how she feels a sense of personal responsibility to help transplants of color feel more comfortable after moving to Portland:

> Because Portland is the way it is, I'm super intentional and deliberate with who I surround myself with and I make sure to reach out to people who moved from other places and experience this culture shock when they get here and they're like "Wow, Portland is really white and I'm experiencing all these weird microaggressions that I have not experienced before." So I try to bring people like that in and make them feel welcome and comfortable. That's why I think I've pushed myself to be more outgoing, just to be the person I might have needed back when I was feeling more fearful here. I find that fulfilling.

Tashi makes a conscious effort to help others combat "culture shock" and isolation upon moving to the city. She even changes aspects of her personality to be more extroverted, taking on quasi-mentorship role to help transplants of color build social support networks upon arrival. Later in the interview, Tashi mentioned how difficult it is to retain professionals of color in Portland, noting that the "racial environment here just drives qualified people out after one or two years". Tashi conquers her earlier fears of violence and social isolation by cultivating community and close ties with newcomers.

Michelle, a 36-year-old Black woman and public health professional, felt optimistic about growing community spaces and networking events for people of color in Portland:

> I think POC communities- especially new people [transplants]- are getting better at letting folks know about various events in town. In my opinion, I think its young people. We're not havin' it anymore and we want to be connected. I have a regular standing date on my calendar called the Black Women's Hang where I have cocktails with some Black women that I'm friends with because I need to center time in my life to spend with other POC here, and in Portland you have to work harder to do that…and with that I know I have a number of brown people I can go to, you know? We're gonna have a potluck next week and I'm excited to see all my people at the potluck. We're being really intentional about creating time and space to see each other.

99

Michelle knows that being around other people of color is not the default in Portland, so she is intentional about spending quality time with other Black women. Collins (1990) highlights the importance of community spaces by and for Black women to foster relationships with one another separate from overlapping forms of gendered and racial oppression that shape their interactions. These spaces promote "shared recognition", "affirm Black women's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (113). Michelle also attributes the growing prevalence of Portland's BIPOC community events to the intentional efforts of recent transplants who move to Portland from more diverse cities. One such transplant, Crystal (34, Black, woman), described her experiences at a popular networking event for professionals of color in Portland:

> I go to an event called Say Hey!, which is the largest event in Portland for professionals of color to connect. I really just enjoy being in that environment because there's no other place or time when you get to be in a room full of Black people here. That event invigorates me. It gives me hope and it just, it... I don't know, it just invigorates me. It combats the malaise, I think.

Earlier in the interview, Crystal described a feeling of "malaise" that envelops Portland, which she associates with the city's lack of racial diversity. Say Hey! is a free quarterly networking and community-building event for professionals of color who have recently relocated to Oregon or Southwest Washington. Even if for a moment, events like Say Hey! provides Black Portlanders like Crystal a reprieve from ambient racism and the emotional labor that accompanies professional life in white organizations (Evans and Moore 2015; Ray 2019). What might seem mundane in more diverse cities is significant in Portland; community spaces where people of color are the majority invigorate Portlanders like Crystal who otherwise struggle to feel at home in the city. Similar sentiments were echoed by Daisy (39, Iranian American, woman) who regularly teaches BIPOC yoga classes:

> I teach BIPOC classes once a week with other instructors who are also people of color. That for me is super fulfilling and that's the population I enjoy working with. It feels so

good. The people the room, their commentary, people saying they needed that space, that it feels so good to them, that has been very rewarding for me...We POC come together on our own because white people are not showing up for us, so we will show up for ourselves. And it feels really good. It feels good to be with other immigrants, children of immigrants, first-generation, people of color, African American and Indigenous people. I really truly feel good in that company. It's like a breath of fresh air. We have been putting more efforts into communities of color so our strategy is to connect with one another, heal together, create our own groups away from white people so we can thrive, have leadership, feel empowered and do the things we need to do. We may or may not have white people on board, so the question that drives me is what can we do now to enjoy our existence anyway?

Daisy repeatedly expresses how good it feels to share space with other people of color. Earlier in the interview, she shared how uncomfortable she felt teaching and attending yoga classes that were almost exclusively white. She also expressed frustration with Portland's yoga culture, which she described as "elitist", "appropriative" and rife with "forced politeness" and microaggressions. Despite its origins in South Asia, American yoga is a commodified activity that reflects gendered race and class hierarchies (Ganhdi 2009). Nearly 37 million U.S. adults practice yoga. More than 70 percent are women, 85 percent identify as white, and more than 40 percent of yoga practitioners earned over $75,000 a year, and 25 percent over $100,000 annually (Park et al. 2015). Some have even described yoga studios as "the new country clubs" (Putcha 2021). Although yoga offers many mental and physical health benefits, ironically, the social space of yoga studios are a source of discomfort for nonwhite yoga practitioners like Daisy. Soojin (42, Korean, woman) who regularly attends yoga classes, also felt this discomfort: "I think the reason why I have problems with yoga here is not just whiteness, but white plus affluent. It's a particular culture that makes me feel isolated". In defiance of these dynamics, Daisy now only teaches BIPOC yoga classes and offers sliding scale prices. For her, "showing up for ourselves" and "enjoying our existence" means practicing agency and cultivating intentional spaces separate from race and class hierarchies that shape public and recreational

spaces in Portland. For many participants, this is key to feeling good. Jen (23, Korean American, woman) also sought out POC recreational meet-up groups to combat exclusion from Portland's recreational cultures:

> Going back to Portland having a reputation of being quirky, naturally beautiful, and people there having hobbies like hiking and whatever- those activities are so exclusionary to the extent where I'm like online searching for POC hiking groups. I'm in this group called "Asians in Portland who Love Camping" and I'm like in what world am I living in? (laughs). Can you imagine a group like that in LA? People would laugh. Portland is so white we had to form our own camping group just for Asians. Yeah, you have to kind of since you feel so excluded from everything else you have to go to great lengths just to enjoy what the city has to offer. And to be honest it does feel really great to go camping with a bunch of other Asians and people of color. I just think it would be silly to do something like that in LA but in Portland that's what I did to feel good.

Like others, Jen sought out BIPOC-specific groups in order to "feel good". When I asked Jen what made her feel excluded from outdoor activities and broader culture in Portland, she said: "It's not like people are like "Hi I'm racist", but you get that vibe because you never see people who look like you on the trails, in the REI [outdoor recreation store], and who knows, there are white supremacists out here so I don't always feel one hundred percent comfortable roaming the forests". Jen refers to symbolic exclusion and fears of overt violence. Being from Los Angeles, she finds it somewhat absurd that racially-specific outdoor groups are popular in Portland. However, they provided her a sense of safety an avenue to combat exclusion from mainstream recreational culture in Portland. Alongside the Asian/Asian American Camping Group Jen refers to, there are numerous Facebook groups that facilitate meetups and outdoor activities for communities of color in Portland. Groups and organizations such as "PDX People of Color Outdoors" and "Portland POC Hikes" are prominent groups on Facebook with hundreds of members. Other groups such as "Friends on Bikes" aims to diversify the Portland cycling scene by connecting cyclers and hosting rides for women and non-binary Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Relatedly, "Vive NW" is a nonprofit organization that connects local Latinx

communities with outdoor activities. The group hosts hikes, ski lessons, stand-up paddle

boarding and snowshoeing excursions. Groups like these helps connect and empower BIPOC

Portlanders as they enjoy the area's natural beauty and recreational amenities, which have

historically excluded communities of color (Comley 2018; Hoffman 2016).

Several participants found comfort in Portland's more racially diverse neighborhoods and

immigrant-owned businesses. Soojin (42, Korean, woman) frequents a Chinese-owned coffee

shop because she feels more comfortable in the presence of the business owners:

> Now I pay more attention to the business owner's ethnicity and I try to, for example, I go
> to a coffee shop often that is Chinese-owned on Alberta. They may not have the same
> need to be around other Asians- I know that because I've met many other Asian
> Americans who don't really have the need to be around other Asians or people of color. I
> was like that in the past. But even though they might not need that, it feels good to me to
> be around them. It's almost like a sigh of relief when I see another Asian person in my
> yoga class or in my workplace.

Soojin recognizes that not all Asian Americans want to surround themselves with other Asian

Americans. It wasn't until she became more race-conscious that she began to feel compelled to

be around other Asian Americans. Regardless, Soojin now knows what feels good to her and

seeks out spaces that feel comfortable. Even the sight of another Asian/Asian American stranger

in her yoga class elicits a "sigh of relief". Although Soojin is Korean, her sense of comfort and

connection with Chinese American business owners and other Asian Americans reflect the

power of Asian American panethnic identity, which emerges from shared experiences of

racialization in the United States (Espiritu 2011; Võ 2004). This is especially salient in majority

white contexts like Portland, where a diverse range of Asian Americans make up only 8 percent

of the population. Ngoc (37, Vietnamese American, woman)- a leader in an Asian American

community-based organization highlighted this issue:

> Here in Portland there are so few of us, our organizing is responsible for huge swaths of
> people, so we have to come together. I tell people our organization has to be a mile wide

and in inch deep. It's not like in California where you have orgs working by and for specific communities like the Vietnamese community or the Korean community in a concentrated area.

Thus, resisting ambient racism for participants like Soojin and others, means seeking the company of other Asian Americans and people of color despite ethnic differences. This facilitates social and emotional connectedness, and also cultivates pan-ethnic political solidarities that respond to structural forces (Espiritu 2011).

Diana, a 23-year-old, Mexican and Salvadoran American woman also sought out comfort of immigrant family-owned businesses:

Most people wouldn't think to go to Beaverton for Mexican ice cream or Southeast 82nd for Vietnamese food, but it's those small little areas that provide that comfort. It's also really cool because most of those places are family-owned businesses, so it's like they know you're a regular and know your order, and it's nice. It's nice to be around people who get you and it feels kind of like a safe haven and a real community.

Diana points out that businesses in seemingly mundane parts of town and outlying suburbs feel like a "safe haven". These spaces elicit feelings familiarity and cultural connectedness which counteract feelings of alienation that accompany ambient racism. Similarly, Claudia (24, Mexican, woman) intentionally spent time in more diverse neighborhoods and community spaces:

I enjoy the environment in the southeast 82nd neighborhood where APANO is [a local Asian American organization]. I'm not even Asian but the neighborhood has more POC and immigrants. It's a nice space. and I went their [APANO] once for work, but I been going more often for meetings that I didn't even need to be at. I've just been going because I felt more comfortable there since its mostly POC.

Even though Claudia does not identify as Asian, she feels at ease at APANO community events simply because of the proportion of people of color in the meetings and surrounding neighborhood. Tashi (39, Tibetan American, woman) shared similar sentiments:

To stay sane, I like to hangout in Southeast Portland around 82nd and Division because there are a lot of other Asians there so I look like everyone in that area and that's where

the good Asian food is, and just more people of color. I feel more comfortable being in that neighborhood. It feels more real and less stuffy.

Portland's pervasive whiteness give neighborhoods like southeast 82nd (The Jade District) more meaning. At first glance, the Jade District looks like a series of unremarkable strip malls and used car lots strung together along the heavily trafficked 82nd street. However, this neighborhood has some of the most racially diverse census tracts in the state of Oregon and is home to a large proportion of Asian American and Latinx immigrant and refugee communities. The area boasts many immigrant-owned businesses such as phở restaurants, dim sum parlors, and boba milk tea shops which cater to local tastes. Because of the Jade Districts's demographic and cultural landscape, Claudia and Tashi do not feel minoritized in this neighborhood. In particular, Tashi views it as an escape from "more stuffy" parts of the city. By invoking the descriptor of "stuffy", Tashi refers to the suffocating nature of whiteness and ambient racism. Part of "staying sane" in Portland for participants like Tashi means frequenting neighborhoods and businesses that do not feel enveloped by ambient racism.

Highlighted in chapter two, ambient racism requires people of color to adhere to white norms in historically white spaces. Fostering community for Black, Indigenous, and people of color to socialize, network, and enjoy recreational activities creates spaces where people of color can let their guard down without experiencing the everyday emotional toll of ambient racism. While Portland's more racially diverse neighborhoods and immigrant-owned small businesses were not intentionally created as POC-only spaces, they are still a welcome respite from Portland's overwhelming demographic whiteness, microaggressions, and extraneous forms of emotional labor required when navigating white space. According to Collins ([1990] 2009), cultivating safe spaces are an integral step toward empowerment: "The importance of these safe spaces is that they provide opportunities for self-definition; and self-definition is the first step to

empowerment: if a group is not defining itself, then it is being defined by and for the use of others." (5). Seeking out people, spaces, and places that *feel good* is key in combating the deleterious effects of ambient racism.

Leveraging Privilege

Some participants leveraged aspects of their privilege and access to material resources to support their own communities and expand opportunities for people of color in Portland. Several used their occupational roles and roles in community organizations in strategic ways to channel funds and services in response to community-identified needs. Others drew upon their social capital and alliances with powerful white community members to facilitate change. Most reported that these practices gave them a sense of purpose in their professional role, and even felt like a form of self-care. While the effects of ambient racism may manifest emotionally, their causes are deeply structural. Therefore, forms of resistance that address both structural and emotional harm correspond with the multiple dimensions through which ambient racism operates. While large-scale structural change is difficult to achieve, the following narratives highlight how Portlanders of color from a range of ethnic backgrounds pool resources and incorporate redistributive practices into their occupational roles to address material inequalities. These strategies are not novel, but part of a long legacy of economic cooperation and collective agency practiced by marginalized groups in response to structural violence (Nembhard 2014).

Michelle (36, Multiracial Black Woman), who works for a state public health agency, shared how her occupational role involves opportunities to direct public funds toward underserved communities of color:

> Most importantly, how can I make sure communities of color get money? That's the kind of shit I'm into. We're doing strategic planning right now and my team very strategically

106

uplifts POC communities. We created a grant for multiple millions of dollars that we will funnel to communities of color in a way that's based on what they want. My approach is, "Hey, communities of color, tell us what you want in your community. We'll give you a bunch of money and you have two years to do the work." We shouldn't be like "Oh think the Latinx community needs this". No, the Latinx community should tell us what they need, what grocers they want in the neighborhood, etcetera. Let them create it. So our job is to jump through the hoops of getting that money, and to be playing with sums of money that large is like woah, I've never had that opportunity, so you're damn right I'm gonna make sure that money goes to Black and brown people. We've done research that shows POC communities know how to reach their own communities. Its common sense you'd think. They just need government to give them the money and let them do the work.

Michelle stresses the importance of community self-determination. She rejects paternalistic governance strategies that overlook community-identified needs and understands her role as conduit between the state and underserved communities. Michelle's insider administrator position grants her the opportunity to wage what Collins ([1990] 2009) calls "insider resistance". As inside resistors, Black women who gain positions of authority within powerful institutions find opportunities to "use bureaucratic resources toward humanistic ends" (300). Similarly, Vasquez-Tokos and Norton-Smith (2016) found that economically stable Latino men used their professional roles to meet needs identified in their communities. Later in the interview, Michelle shared that this aspect of her job fulfills her: "I know there's a lot of red tape, but at the end of the day I know I'm directing large sums of money where it needs to go and where it has not been historically, you know? That's what helps me sleep peacefully at night." Indeed, Michelle's occupational role allows her to pull institutional strings in strategic ways that redistribute material resources. This does not only benefit the communities she serves, but also provides Michelle a sense of peace and personal fulfillment. Roger (29, Chinese American, man) also leveraged his occupational role in ways that benefit marginalized groups. As a massage therapist, Roger provides affordable massage therapy for low-income and communities of color who have historically lacked access to alternative forms of health care:

> Something I try to work on is getting more coverage for people who may need massage but don't have access. For people of color in Portland I offer sliding scale and home calls. These are incentives designed to make massage easier to access. I don't know if it's just me, but when I'm working with people of color I do notice they tend to be nicer clients at the end of the day, just happier and more appreciative it seems. It's nice to have a happy exchange and provide those opportunities so I do what I can to make these services more accessible.

Roger went on to discuss the healing effects of massage therapy, questioning, "Why should only people with money be able to have this?" By providing sliding scale massage therapy services to low-income clients and people of color, Roger is willing to sacrifice some income to have "happy exchanges" with clients who have not had regular access to these services.

Danny (31, Multiracial Black, man) a real estate agent, provides free home-buying consultations and group workshops for Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Portland who are considering purchasing a home for the first time. At the time of our interview, Danny routinely advertised his services and home-buying workshops on a 'POC Portland' Facebook group. I attended one of his workshops, which combined a discussion of the history of red-lining in Portland and general home-buying information. There were approximately twenty people in attendance, and all appeared to be people of color; the majority were Black. Danny invited guest speakers from organizations that represent the descendants of homeowners whose properties were condemned by the Portland Development Commission during the expansions of Legacy Emanuel Hospital in Northeast Portland in the 1970's. They shared first and second-hand accounts of their parent's and grandparents being displaced by the Portland Development Commission and its lack of transparency with Black residents in Portland's Albina neighborhood. In the second half of the workshop, Danny discussed the logistics of home-buying, such as credit, loan types, and debt-to-income ratios. After the event, I asked Danny what compels him to organize these workshops. He said:

My goal is to help as many people as I can. When I saw that there was this big scar in Portland around housing I realized there was something I could do. Even though people view Portland as this liberal place it has some deep conservatism and people have been hurt. So I started posting on the Portland POC Facebook group about real estate and offering free consultations and I started to feel like this is where I could be most useful. As a person of color, I feel I can relate more to these folks and the need seems to be there. People want to buy homes but some don't know where to start or whether it's even possible, so it's almost like a no-brainer to me.

Danny recognizes that the historical legacies of wealth and housing inequality in Portland shape contemporary housing markets. While the real estate industry is notorious for exploiting and excluding communities of color (Orser 2014; Nguyen 2018), Danny understands his role as a real estate agent as a means for helping others. Like other participants, Danny leverages his occupational role in an attempt to address material inequalities, but also reports a sense of personal fulfillment from feeling connected to clients and "feeling useful".

Alex (49, Black, woman) also shared how she uses her economic and occupational privilege to address structural inequalities. Like other participants, this was an integral part of maintaining her mental health:

So I have the first world privilege of building and designing furniture from midcentury modern material for a living. I also own a coworking space, so every Friday people of color work there for free, and people come and ask me, "Wow how do you do this?" And I'm like, I'm using my privilege and that's the least I can do. It's also self-care. It's not for resumé purposes, it's about self-care. And it surprises people that I'm honest about it and I'm like, there is no way I'm going to make it here if I don't get some help and give some help. And I'm not a person to just let it go. I'm a person that's like, what's the best we can do right now? So, while I'm here in Portland I will do everything I can to make it a better place for people of color and especially LGBTQ people of color because that's part of my mental health.

Alex intentionally directs the resources she has to give toward community members who need them. She implies that this is one way she stays emotionally intact while living in Portland despite the "emotional crushing" she described earlier in the interview. After learning that I was commuting from Eugene to Portland weekly to conduct research with no permanent work space

in the city, Alex offered me a free year-long membership to her co-working space in Portland, explaining, "This is for you, but it's also for me. I know the work you're doing is draining and time-consuming. They want you to burn out and it's so easy to, so I'm happy to provide a place here for you to work, do your interviews, and get these stories heard". By providing me and others without the means to pay monthly fees for a co-working space, Alex uses her role as a business owner to create intentional and accessible work spaces for BIPOC and LGBTQ students, creatives, and freelance employees.

Several participants drew upon their social capital and networks to channel money and toward communities of color in Portland. Michelle referred to the power of online social networks for mutual aid and fundraising:

> The POC Portland Facebook groups are important because they also become a place to help those in your community. Like, someone would post talking about how they're fundraising money for their seventeen-year-old's graduation gift and I'll be like, "I got 25 on that", so it's a place we can pool resources. We also organize cash mobs where we get together and go to spend money at POC businesses in town, that way we're circulating money into our community and being conscious of where we spend.

Using Facebook groups to organize cash mobs in support of local POC-owned businesses contributes to the health of local economies, but also demonstrates collective agency in which individual community members work together toward intentional goals. Redistributive practices such as mutual aid and cooperative economics have a long legacy in African American, immigrant, and refugee communities (Nembhard 2014; Curtis 2013). Du Bois' theory of racial cooperative economic development traces the multiple spheres through which Black Americans generated, pooled, and distributed financial resources within their own communities (1907). Political economist, Jessica Gordon Nembhard (2014) found that, in every period of American history, African Americans pooled resources to solve personal, family, social, political, and economic challenges. She conceptualizes cooperation as "a deliberate and necessary expansion

of in-group solidarity and cohesion." (24). Online mutual aid and cash mob networks made up of Black Portlanders and other people of color demonstrate how online social ties mobilize financial resources. While Du Bois could not account for the rise of social media, he conceptualized how consumer-producer cooperation contribute to self-sustaining Black economies: "We can by consumers and producers co-operation, . . .establish a progressively self-supporting economy that will weld the majority of our people into an impregnable, economic phalanx." (Du Bois 1933). These strategies were especially effective during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which many small businesses struggled to survive. In response, large scale events like "Support Black-Owned Restaurants Week PDX" were organized online to stimulate business for Black-owned restaurants in the Portland metropolitan area. Event organizers created restaurant directories and take-out calendars for the week of August 24th-30th in order to spotlight local Black-owned restaurants and help these businesses absorb the economic shock of the pandemic. The organizers of Support Black-Owned Restaurants PDX also used their platform to highlight anti-Black racism in Portland. The homepage of their website states: "Let's elevate the voices of Black leaders and contribute financially to help. We recommend taking a look at the social media feeds of our Black-owned Business owners. Keeping a business going in the midst of terror (aka, Working While Black) is no joke. Our communities are WROUGHT." This statement communicates the difficult position of Black business owners in light of the summer of 2020, which was defined by the COVID-19 pandemic and clashes between antifascists, white supremacists, and the police throughout Portland. These events put Black business owners at the intersection of overlapping racial and economic crises, which quite literally and economically threatened their livelihood. Black Restaurants Week

represents one of many efforts to mobilize resources and networks in support of local Black economies.

Ana (42, multiracial Mexican American and white, woman)- a longtime resident and community organizer who was born and raised in Portland understood herself as a bridge between wealthy white community members, community-based organizations, and structurally vulnerable Portlanders:

> So with well-meaning white privileged people, what I do is connect them with community orgs. I'm like "Hey, you wanna put your money somewhere? Here's some groups. You wanna volunteer? Here's some opportunities. I'm not here to just guilt trip you. The questions I ask is, who has resources? Who doesn't? How can we work together? We have to see people who have resources come together with more vulnerable people in our community and say how can I make this shit available? How can I make an investment? Reallocating scarce resources is what I'm talking about. What needs to happen is to get privileged communities to give the money to organizations led directly by Black and brown people who have lived in the community. Those are the projects I support and my organization supports… I go into spaces now for my work and like the meetings with community stakeholders and the police, and those are rooms in the past I would not touch with a ten foot stick in my life, nor would my peers. But at the same time, it's like do you want to be at the table or do you want to be on the menu?

Similar to Michelle, Ana works to channel material resources toward community-identified needs. While she feels uncomfortable in spaces where decisions are made- especially those that involve the Portland police- she attends because she knows the implications of her absence could put herself and structurally vulnerable community members at risk (i.e. "being on the menu"). Ana is centrally concerned about issues of inequality, and uses her connections in the community to redistribute money. She implied that her cultural capital and racially ambiguous appearance helps her form relationships with white community members: "I have a degree and I'm light skinned, so I can talk to these people in a way that makes sense to them. They do want to help so I try to run with that". Ana recognizes that having embodied characteristics such as light skin and that "right" style of communication makes her a palatable presence for white Portlanders with

112

money to give. She strategically uses these aspects of her privilege to direct resources from

"well-meaning white people" toward BIPOC-led organizations. Rather than contributing to what

she calls "white guilt", Ana finds productive ways to re-allocate white wealth. Minh (34,

Vietnamese American, woman) was also strategic in her involvement with white organizations in

Portland:

> I've been to a lot of board meetings for different organizations and foundations around the city and I join them because I want to. They are all white, almost everybody on the boards is white. I wanted to reach out to different communities and be involved. I want to try. I think people perceive us Asians as people who do not speak English, and many people think if your English is not good then you're not smart. Language is language and your intelligence is something different…Sadly I feel like the Asian community is perceived as like we are only focused on ourselves or our own family. We're viewed like we don't really care about the society, but that's not true. I join the boards to show we are not that and it's something I can control to help our community. But the white people are very nice and most importantly is they have money they want to give…That's why I go to the meeting, I make suggestion of where the money should go. To be honest, I don't feel comfortable to be around the white people on the board. Not because they treat me poorly, but it's not my comfort zone. I feel I have to speak English a certain way, think and talk about different stuff in a different way. But at the same time I don't want to limit myself or my community. We need to be in these roles because that's how we can change society. That's what we can control. That's my view of it.

Minh, who was born in raised in rural central Vietnam, immigrated to Portland approximately

twelve years prior to our interview after graduating from one of Vietnam's top universities. She

earned her Master's degree in the U.S. and works as a data analyst. Minh chooses to be involved

in white organizations as a board member to influence the direction of funds and dispel

racialized stereotypes about Asian Americans as perpetually foreign and apolitical. Like Ana, she

admits that these predominantly white spaces are uncomfortable, but also an important

opportunity to stimulate organizational change and address hegemonic processes that erase Asian

and Asian Americans' contributions to society. While white organizations are notorious for

reproducing "inequality regimes" regardless of intent (Acker 1990; Ray 2019), Minh's

community involvement provides her a sense of agency and control within overarching experiences of racialization.

The mostly middle-class and college-educated participants' access to forms of social, economic, and cultural capital bolstered their ability to address structural inequalities that impact communities they care about. This in turn, became one way they dealt with the emotional effects of ambient racism. In some ways, these participants put into practice Karl Marx's popular adage, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". While the structural domain of power is more resilient to change (Collins 1990), participant's actions and perspectives suggest a shared concern about material conditions and commitments to the collective good.

Empowerment: Refusal and Self-Definition

Even though some participants worked to disrupt structural forces that produce inequalities, maintaining personal and interpersonal well-being was just as important. In this subsection, I highlight how participants understand the meaning of self-definition, self-care, and empowerment in their lives. Respondents shared strategies they use to preserve their sense of self and identity in majority white settings. Some discussed how they maintain their mental health and cultivate joy despite the enduring power of ambient racism and intersecting oppressions. Others spoke about a *refusal* to internalize harmful self-and group perceptions. Through refusal, participants reject the power of structural forces over their self-perceptions and replace dominant narratives with empowering self-definitions.

Ambient racism shapes the emotions and self-perceptions of Portlanders of color because it emerges from a range of historical processes that produce demographic underrepresentation and misrepresentation. Collins' concept of controlling images illustrate how limiting and

114

negative depictions of Black women are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other

forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and even inevitable parts of everyday life"

(Collins [1990] 2009: 77). Some have applied the concept of controlling images to other racially

marginalized groups, indicating how they negate group and self-worth, but also create

opportunities for resistance (Uchida 1998; Vasquez-Tokos and Norton Smith 2016). Whether or

not structural and demographic conditions in Portland change, participants found multiple ways

to refuse the internalization of racism and other hegemonic forms of oppression. Self-definition

is especially effective at resisting hegemonic forms of power, which manipulate culture and

ideology to legitimize unjust power relations. According to Collins (1990) the journey toward

constructing knowledge of the self involves rejecting dominant narratives and refusing to

internalize controlling images. In a context where ambient racism may contribute to a

fragmented sense of identity for people of color, maintaining pride, cultivating joy, and

practicing self-care are uniquely political acts.

Kristina (23, Black and Mexican, woman) discussed how maintaining a strong sense of

identity and self-worth helps her combat internalized racism:

> Yes, of course it's hard being a person of color in Portland, but at the end of the day I
> don't let certain things affect me because when I know who I am I don't let it affect me
> just because they call me this or that, or look at me a certain way doesn't mean that's who
> I am. They can think that, but it's not who I am. Because you can get conditioned very
> quickly and lose who you are very quickly if you don't stay anchored to something that
> brings you peace, that brings you happiness, that brings you joy, because if you don't do
> that, then you're not going to remember who you fully are. You're gonna let others tell
> you who you are, and I don't let that happen. But one thing I really do is self-care.
> you have to allow yourself to do that especially as a person of color who lives here.
> Because as much as this city wants to say they're allies, they're not.

Kristina refers to "conditioning" that BIPOC may experience in Portland. She implies that one

can "forget" who they are in majority white contexts where people of color may feel minoritized,

invisible, or distrustful of purported allies. For Kristina, self-definition and joy are the antidote to

these alienating dynamics. I asked Kristina what brings her joy and how she takes care of herself at the personal level:

> So for self-care I like to go watch movies by myself, take myself out to eat, watch a lot of Netflix, read. I try to do daily affirmations. I go in front of the mirror and say to myself who I am. Because if I say out loud who I am and in my mind. You may call me the N-word but that's not who I am. I know who I am. So I'ma let you have your racist rant, but I'm gonna keep going with my life. We're the ones who have to build ourselves up to be strong but if white people had a day in our shoes they could not handle it. I'm blessed to be a woman of color. I'm blessed to be Black and Latina. I wouldn't want it any other way because there's a uniqueness I'm gifted with regardless of what people say. I think I'm badass!

Kristina refuses to derive her sense of self-worth in relation to white society. She tries to cultivate an independent sense of self by affirming her multiple identities and lived experiences. This self-empowering inner dialogue disrupts mechanisms of the interpersonal domain of power, which functions through routinized, everyday and internalized racism and other forms of oppression. By cultivating a sense of pride, Kristina deflates the power of controlling images in her life and replaces them with self-defined knowledge. Indeed, "Racist and sexist ideologies, if they are disbelieved, lose their impact" (Collins [1990] 2009: 284). Kristina reframes experiences with racism as a source of personal strength, rather than a source of pain. Michelle (36, Multiracial Black, woman) also discussed what brings her joy:

> For me, the physical beauty here and recreation is so important. I spend a lot of time camping in the summer and that just feeds my soul. I struggle with the idea of living someplace like New York with more concrete than trees. Even though there's problems, this is home for me, so I do what I can to find happiness.

At the personal level, camping and spending time in nature brings Michelle closer to her sense of self (i.e. 'feeding her soul'). In contrast to transplants of color who reported feeling excluded from recreational life in the Pacific Northwest, Michelle, who was born and raised in southwest Washington, feels most at home in nature. She jokingly described her childhood like the "Black Goonies": "I was like a Black Goonie. I spent my childhood camping, biking, and we were

always outside… I genuinely didn't know any different because it was just my life. I mean, we were poor but we had fun. I was a kid, so I didn't have language for the various forms of racism my family was experiencing." By spending time camping, Michelle is able to access joy she felt as a child, before she could articulate the realities of racism in her life. These activities combat alienation and reinforce the feeling that the Pacific Northwest is "home" for her. Kristina and Michelle's narratives remind us that, while the power of ambient racism is diffuse and encompassing, it does not define the entirety of BIPOC's experiences. Alex (49, Black, woman) also spoke to the importance of mental health maintenance and self-preservation:

> I need to take care of my own mental health so I can keep consistent in the game of change. It's very basic, but it's also something that I had to learn. It's like, no matter what I think my job is, at the end of the day my job is to look at myself in the mirror and make it home at night to my wife and my baby. That's all it is for me. I will not allow anyone to do anything to fuck up my mental health or define who I am. I'm trying to keep my mental health. I'm not gonna let you kill me. I go into every day asking myself how I will be steadfast and true to my vision and make it to the end of the day without going coo coo for coco puffs.

Like others, Alex is intentional in her effort to preserve her mental health and safety. She understands the connection between her personal health and the health of her family and community (i.e. protecting one's own health to "keep in the game of change"). In an environment that she described earlier in the interview as "crazy-making", Alex refuses to allow dominant narratives to define her. For her, staying mentally healthy in Portland is an act of resistance.

Several participants described how they strengthen their sense of identity and pride through culturally relevant activities, such as cooking, food, language, hair care, and youth mentorship. These activities constitute "cultural resistance"- an attempt to resist assimilation and erasure by dominant culture through activities and practices that reinforce the cultural agency of

minoritized groups (Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Moghissi 1999). In this sense, culture is a

conduit for resisting hegemony and key in the recuperation of self-definition. This was true for

Lara (22, Colombian American, woman), who moved to Portland from her hometown of Miami:

> When I first got here I had a lot of food shame. I had this white vegan roommate who was
> hardcore so I always felt weird about eating meat or even my every day meal like rice
> and beans. I eat that like every day and so I was kind of looked at weirdly for that. The
> time I lived on campus was weird, I didn't want to go to the cafeteria. Now I feel like
> I'm reclaiming my identity through food, so now my attitude is like hell yeah I eat rice
> and beans every day, what you gonna do about it?! That's how I was raised in Miami.

Lara was able to transform her shame around food into a source of pride. While it may seem

mundane, eating beans and rice daily reminded Lara of where she comes from, which reinforced

her sense of identity in an environment where she felt misunderstood. Rachel (23, Mexican

American, woman) moved to Portland for college, and often felt isolated and homesick. Like

Lara, food is a source of comfort and an identity anchor for Rachel:

> I respect all the vegan stuff here but sometimes I just want greasy tacos and a non-
> environmentally friendly Styrofoam cup of horchata because it reminds me of being
> home. Sometimes when I'm homesick I'll do little things. I'll make something called
> sopita de letras. It's like a little seasoned tomato soup with the letters pasta, which I grew
> up on. That was my childhood. Whenever I was sick, or it was cold and rainy, my mom
> would always make that, so I make that for myself to feel comfort. I mainly try to feel
> connected to my culture through food. I love food.

Both Rachel and Lara discuss the significance of cultural foods in their lives in contrast to vegan

and sustainable food culture, which are often implicitly coded as white (Alkon, Cadji, and Moore

2019). By saying that she sometimes "just wants greasy tacos and a non-environmentally

friendly Styrofoam cup of horchata" Rachel rejects aspects of Portland's liberal elite milieu, in

which distinction is achieved through practices like environmental virtue signaling- "a

performative act, that signals an awareness of and adherence to environmental values"

(McClintock 2018: 582; Naylor 2012). This demonstrates how some Portlanders of color may

feel at odds with Portland's reputation as a sustainability capital, which valorizes symbols of

environmentalism such as urban gardens, (McClintock 2018), farmers markets (Alkon et al. 2019), and biking infrastructure (Hoffman 2016). While environmentally-friendly amenities are not explicitly harmful or racially exclusionary, they represent an overarching dominant culture that surveils individual behaviors and make residents like Rachel and Lara *feel* like they do not belong- a key attribute of ambient racism. By adhering to their food traditions and listening to their cravings, participants like Lara and Rachel find comfort in uncomfortable places.

Language is another key dimension of culture through which participants maintained their sense of identity. Upon reflecting on her son being born and raised in Portland, Lan (34, Vetnamese American, woman), who was born and raised in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam shared:

> My son is Vietnamese. We are Vietnamese, so it's good for him to learn the Vietnamese language. I feel he should be good at both, not just listen and cannot speak back. I don't want that for him. I think about identity too. I talk to some Vietnamese American people who are born and raised here and they feel confused about their identity. Like they are not sure if they're Vietnamese and not sure if they are American. I do not want that for my son. I want him to have an identity as Vietnamese, like a clear identity. I learn this because I join an Asian American group and I hear more from kids of immigrants and I learn more about how they express their thoughts. Many of them feel like they don't know who they are, so I will make sure my son knows Vietnamese so he can feel sure and feel proud.

Lan moved to Portland approximately eight years prior to our interview. By attending AAPI support groups, she became familiar with the experiences of American-born Asians whose racial-ethnic identities may feel fractured due to intersecting forces of assimilation, erasure, and foreigner racialization (Fujiwara 2008). Lan recognizes her son's potential vulnerability to these dynamics, which are especially potent in predominantly white regional contexts (Cheng 2013). By making sure her son is fluent in Vietnamese, Lan actively resists aspects of ambient racism and assimilation that that impact youth who may not have the tools to navigate multiple forms of hegemonic oppression. Similarly, Elena, a 34-year-old woman and descendant of Chinookan

peoples, shared her enthusiasm about the revival and practice of *Chinuk Wawa*- a native trade

language used by Indigenous people throughout the Pacific Northwest:

> For a long time I felt like there wasn't that connection with a native language in my life because that was stolen from us. I grew up speaking English. Now I see that there is this effort to preserve that part of our culture […] I see more young people speaking Chinuk Wawa and I think they even offer a Chinuk Wawa class at the community college down in Eugene. So this kind of thing makes me feel more hopeful about the future for my people and my culture.

Elena recognizes the importance of language preservation in resisting settler colonial erasure.

She also implies that these erasures made her feel disconnected from her Native identity during

early socialization. Indeed, the revitalization of native languages is one dimension of

decolonization and "ethnic renewal" among American Indians and may in turn, facilitate

political activism (Nagel 1995; Steinman 2015). While settler colonial erasure is distinct from

racism, they often work together in service of white settler colonial hegemony (Moreton-

Robinson 2004). Because language is central to cultural identity formation, Elena's narrative

highlights the importance of cultural revival in resisting the combined effects of settler colonial

erasure and ambient racism.

Victoria (44, Black/African, woman) also shared poignant thoughts on the importance of

instilling racial and cultural pride among young Black girls in Portland:

> I always talk about this, and I say if we don't empower young Black girls starting at six, seven, eight, it's too late. They have already absorbed the racism here. So I do hair, I do braids. I do hair for little Black girls and I take that as an opportunity to talk to them. I tell them, love your hair, love yourself. You can do whatever you want to do, and your skin should not have anything to do with that. Love your skin. I tell them about where I grew up [in West Africa] and how beautiful we are. But it's hard. They are really good at this game. For centuries we have just had to adapt. But we have to be at the table, if we are not at the table making decisions your voice will never be heard. So I say, okay, what can I do? I am a public health professional so I can go to where the health policies are made. We have to have an education and get to where these decisions are made. And make sure our voices are heard. I swear. That's the way I see it.

By doing hair, Victoria finds opportunities to mentor and empower Black youth in Portland. She understands this as a means of intervention in the emotional impact of ambient racism in childhood socialization. She is intentional about replacing negative portrayals of Black people with more complex and empowering images. Victoria added: "Do I keep quiet? No! Do I keep pushing? yes! I was raised to speak up. I am making my kids read books about Martin Luther King and Toni Morrison just so they can understand what it means to be Black in America, and to know they can speak up". According to Patricia Hills Collins, mentorship and intergenerational circulation of knowledge is key for fostering self-definition among Black children. When Black and youth of color are taught by co-ethnic elders to "trust their own self-definitions and value themselves, they are offered a powerful tool for resisting oppression" (57). Rather than "adapting" to the racial order, Victoria emphasizes agency, independent self-definition, and racial pride. However, Victoria realizes that individual empowerment alone is not enough to resist the structural foundations of ambient racism; access to institutional power, or "as seat at the table" is also integral to social transformation. Victoria's perspective closely reflects Collins' conceptualization of empowerment, which encompasses the dual challenges of changing individual consciousness and transforming unjust social institutions - or, as Ana (42, Multiracial White/Mexican American, woman) put it: "You can be at the table or you can be on the menu". By breaking with hegemonic modes of being, thinking, and feeling, participants carved out opportunities to bolster their sense of agency and self-worth. These practices allowed some to maintain their emotional well-being and promote empowerment despite the enduring significance of ambient racism in their lives.

Chapter Summary

In preceding chapters, I trace connections between structural racism and racialized emotions in Portland. I conceptualize ambient racism as something more than "just" a temporary feeling, but constituted by the full sum of various modes of racism. This chapter illustrates how resistance takes place on a spectrum of action, ranging from attempts to alleviate structural inequalities, to personal empowerment and self-care. By placing resistance into empirical focus, our understanding of racism incorporates the mutually constitutive relationship between oppression and resistance. I identify how participants resist and cope with ambient racism's multi-dimensions, including its structural, social, and emotional effects. I argue that resistance to ambient racism reflects the multiple dimensions that constitute it. Thus, multiple forms of resistance were practiced by participants simultaneously.

The most common modes of resistance were 1) the creation and frequenting of POC spaces 2) attempts to leverage forms of capital and redistribute material resources, and 3) intentional actions that foster personal empowerment and self-definition. Together, these multiple modes of resistance reflect "the myriad of ways in which ordinary individuals from all walks of life work for social justice in small yet significant ways" (Collins [1990] 2009: 307). By refusing to accept the racial status quo, participant resistance reminds us that Portland is not solely a white space (Anderson 2015), but also a contested space where marginalized groups challenge social hierarchies and assert individual and group agency.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION:

This dissertation empirically analyzes the intersection of racism, place, and emotions in the lives of people of color. I bridge understandings of racial structures and racialized emotions to develop a nuanced understanding of racism that is empirically grounded in experiences of communities of color. Contemporary racism cannot be understood apart from sociospatial histories, as places are "artifacts of past and present racisms, they embody generations of sociospatial relations, what might be called the "sedimentation of racial inequality" (Oliver and Shapiro 1995:5; Pulido 2000: 16). Founded as part of a state intended for white settlers, Portland is economically, politically, and spatially organized in ways that disproportionately benefit whites (Brooks 2004; Gibson 2007; Liévanos, Lubitow, and McGee 2019; McClintock et al. 2016; Shaw and Sullivan 2011). Thus, the "sedimentation" of racial inequality in Portland combined with its demographic whiteness and purported progressivism creates a unique local context in which Portlanders of color experience racialization.

Through the lens of some racially marginalized Portlanders, the city feels more like a "Progressive Jim Crow South" than an open-minded progressive utopia. This disrupts popular notions of Portland, and raises questions about what it means for a place to be "progressive". Importantly, communities of color in Portland are not passive victims. Because racism operates at multiple dimensions of life (structural, interactional, emotional, etc.) so do strategies of resistance. I highlight a few strategies in this dissertation to capture how economic agency, community-building, and the establishment of self-definition counter the forces of ambient racism. These practices are not necessarily aimed at relinquishing deep racial structures, but rather, cultivate feelings of joy, ease, and comfort: feelings that may be dulled by ambient

123

racism. Participant narratives have practical and theoretical significance for future research in sociology, critical race studies, urban planning, and counseling. Future research should incorporate conceptualizations of racism that encompass the total sum of various modes of racism as they manifest in lived experiences across a range of places. The framework of ambient racism illuminates how racial power is enacted by connecting structural and emotional understandings of racism.

Theoretical Implications and Directions for Future Research:

In this dissertation, I develop the concept of *ambient racism,* which describes the ways in which racism envelops multiple dimensions of individuals' lived experiences and emotions. Similar to ambient noise, ambient racism is omnipresent, cumulative, and characterizes the social environments people inhabit. When we take into account the diffuse and shape-shifting power of racism, we can bridge micro and macro racial processes. For example, Oregon's anti-Black history is inseparable from the ways individual Black Portlanders *feel* about living there. Experiencing microaggressions at work is not limited to the workplace itself or clumsy interactional faux pas. Rather, the workplace is a site that *animates* a multitude of racial structures and regional racial formations at play in individuals' lives. The language of ambient racism conveys the specific form of racism operant in a given place, and the overall "feeling" of a place. This more accurately captures the complexity of racism as developed by many race scholars (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Feagin 2006; Jung 2015; Omi and Winant 2015). Although social scientists tend to measure it through individual actions or structural disparities, racism is not either "present" or "absent". It shapes all of life, although at various moments its effects could be acute (a microaggression) or more chronic (like gentrification or segregated neighborhoods).

This dissertation shows how those dynamics work together by drawing from the lived experiences of people of color. Rather than describing racism as a matter of legacies of older forms of discrimination, racism is very much alive in respondents' descriptions of Portland.

Ambient racism emerges from the deep structures that constitute the "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva 1997), and may manifest as colorblind racism, but cannot be contained by colorblind racism alone. This is because ambient racism describes the ways overt racism, meso-level racism (Ray 2019), structural/systemic racism (Feagin 2006), racial schemas (Jung 2015), colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003), and other forms work together to affect the emotions of racialized people. The concept of ambient racism expands sociological theories of racism because it articulates how multiple forms and dimensions of racism come alive in the everyday lived experiences of individuals. While race scholars have captured how multiple forms of racism *operate* to reproduce inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Collins 1991; Feagin 2006; Golash-Boza 2016; Jung 2015; Ray 2019) ambient racism grounds macro and meso forms of racism in lived experiences. For example, the framework of ambient racism captures what it *feels* like to live within an encompassing racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997); these experiences are also shaped by intersecting forces within the matrix of domination (Collins 1991) and may manifest at the organizational level within the structural and schematic confines of racialized organizations (Ray 2019). Because the above conceptualizations of racism are often discussed separately from one another, ambient racism helps articulate how they are, in actuality, experienced together across multiple dimensions of social life. Thus, it is important to note that ambient racism is not necessarily a "new" conceptualization of racism as much as it is meant to articulate how macro and meso dimensions of racism manifest for individuals who navigate everyday life in relation to multiple forms of racism. This works much like the chemical process

of baking, in which the final product is constituted by, yet distinct from the sum of its individual ingredients. Future conceptualizations of racism should elaborate upon how seemingly distinct forms of racism materialize together to shape lived experiences.

Because my findings emerge from the experiences of formally educated people of color, additional research should explore how working class people of color experience Portland and similarly white cities, as these groups' experiences with racism may be distinct from the more formally educated and relatively class-privileged group I spoke to. Since this study focused on commonalties across racial groups, future studies should apply the concept of ambient racism to account for distinct forms of racialization, colorism, and relational dynamics (Molina 2014). For instance, the emotions associated with ambient racism for Asian Americans may be grounded in a broader racial history that cast them as perpetual foreigners and model minorities. In contrast, African Americans' experiences of racialization and emotions emerge from histories of slavery, exploitation, and criminalization that are relationally linked to Asian American's valorization as model minorities (Kim 1999). As such, ambient racism and racialized emotions emerge from racial histories that are distinct, yet contingent upon one another.

Even though the dynamics of ambient racism highlighted in this paper are not limited to Portland or the Pacific Northwest, interviews reveal distinct emotions associated with living and working in a purportedly progressive city with a high proportion of whites. Ambient racism, however, is applicable to national racial dynamics and other localized racial contexts. Ambient racism may persist in more diverse cities like Los Angeles, but emerge from different regional racial formations (Cheng 2013) that are less defined by aggregate demographic whiteness. For instance, the cultural and economic power of a white minority in gentrifying, historically Latinx neighborhoods in Los Angeles may result in feelings of anger and loss among longtime Latinx

126

residents, and contribute to strained intragroup relations spurred by white gentrification (Huante 2019). Even in racially diverse communities, internalized racism and white supremacy shape the emotions of people of color despite having little day-to-day contact with whites (Fanon 1952; Trieu and Lee 2018). Media and popular culture are also important conduits for ambient racism, as they convey messages about beauty, group worth, and superiority/inferiority (Collins 1990). Thus, *a white demographic majority is not a necessary condition of ambient racism*. Rather, unequal power relations lie at the root of ambient racism and its emotional consequences. Future research should explore the multiple iterations of ambient racism across different sites to uncover how intersections of race, demographics, and place produce racialized emotions.

Practical Implications:

Community Mental Health

Mental health counseling is one effective way people of color and other marginalized groups can process racism-related stress while improving quality of life (Fenster 2015; Jones and Pritchett-Johnson 2017). While it is well established that racism has mental health consequences, this project uncovers the often unseen connections between racial structures and emotions, which are closely intertwined with mental health. I also articulate how *racial gaslighting* emerges from sets of conditions that place expectations on racially marginalized groups to adjust to the very racial structures that marginalize them. Racial gaslighting may create cycles of self-blame among people of color who question their own perceptions of reality. This concepts has implications for POC mental health because they locate pathology in white dominated society, rather than the racialized individual. This particularly useful for mental health practitioners, as there is

therapeutic potential in being reminded that the pathology lies in the racialized social environment, not the racialized individual who must live in it.

It is important for mental health professionals to account for the effects of ambient racism on individual clients- that is, the cumulative impact of various modes of racism. This requires researchers and practitioners to move beyond an "effects of race" framework toward an "effects of racism" framework. It is not an individual's race that contributes to racial trauma, but rather, racial structures that bear down upon the individual. This may also help mental health professionals expand upon limited frameworks of "cultural competence", "cultural humility", and multiculturalism, in favor of more structural approaches. This research contributes to growing critical race counseling approaches and social justice- informed therapy, which validate the realities and "ordinariness" of racism in the lives of people of color (Trahan and Lemberger 2014). These frameworks may help racially marginalized groups cease cycles of self-blame by naming social structures that impact their mental health. In doing so, clients can cultivate greater self-efficacy and empowerment.

Facilitating access to racially conscious mental health resources, especially in majority white regions, is paramount. This involves 1) improving access to affordable mental health care through socialized and/or subsidized medicine, 2) eliminating stigma around mental health care within and among communities of color, and 3) growing and retaining a pool of diverse, race-conscious therapists in Oregon. While Oregon is ranked as one of the worst states in the country when it comes to POC's access to mental health care (Matsumoto and Orr 2020), recent developments point to progress in these areas. In response to a demand for mental health therapy among people of color in Oregon, a group of Black and POC-identified Portland-area therapists formed Clinicians of Color Community and Consulting (C4PDX). C4PDX is a collective of

therapists of color in the Portland area that support one another and help clients find a therapist

of color. In 2020, clinicians affiliated with C4PDX have also made a series of policy proposals to

the state's legislative counsel, including the establishment of $50 million fund to improve access

to mental health care for communities of color and a $40 million fund to recruit and retain

clinicians of color through pipeline development, scholarships, stipends and loan repayment

(Matsumoto and Orr 2020). While mental health therapy is not a solution to structural racism,

improving access to mental health care is an important step for marginalized groups to find

spaces in which they can process life experiences, heal, and harness agency.

Anti-Racist Place-Making

This dissertation demonstrates how Portlanders' of color experiences with racism are

entrenched in the particularities of place, space, and history in the region. Portland is a site of

racial struggles, but also a site in which marginalized groups actively shape the places and spaces

they live. *Anti-racist placemaking* involves collaboration between city planners, policy-makers,

community organizations, and everyday community members to addresses structural issues such

as economic stability, housing affordability, and infrastructure access in the creation of urban

spaces (Betancur 2002; Drew 2011). It also requires white community members to confront their

role in perpetuating white domination and "white urban regimes" (Seamster 2015).

While Portland is ranked highly among U.S. cities for its "quality of life" and "livability"

(Monocle Quality of Life Survey 2017), these concepts are not race neutral. The perspectives of

nonwhite community members are often excluded from urban quality of life indicators and

misrecognized in planning survey research (Liévanos, Lubitow, and McGee 2019). As such,

"livability" criteria ought to include indicators of racial climate determined by communities of

color and other marginalized groups in city planning projects. This was reflected in Crystal's narrative, when she said she felt like Portland "was not built with Black people in mind". These problems might also be addressed by facilitating greater trust between planning entities (such as Prosper Portland and Portland Metro) and low-income and communities of color to enable a more equitable distribution of urban amenities. City planners and survey administrators should also respond directly to community-identified needs, using survey and interview methods that explicitly account for racial group differences (Liévanos, Lubitow, and McGee 2019).

Reparations for Black and Indigenous Portlanders may also be an important step in alleviating the effects of structural inequalities and ambient racism in Portland. While reparations do not re-write history, they attempt to bridge the chasm left behind by America's founding as a settler colonial, slave-holding nation. As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014) poignantly put it, for Black Americans, "The wealth gap merely puts a number on something we feel but cannot say". This quote demonstrates the materiality of racialized emotions and the importance of reparations in garnering collective recognition that racial and settler colonial violence are foundational to U.S. economic relations. Reparations also require white Americans to grapple with these racial realities and their participation in practices that replicate racial violence. In the case of Oregon, reparations may also facilitate a vocabulary to talk about race and racism, since living in a predominantly white place may magnify the phenomenon of colorblindness among white Oregonians (Brooks 2004).

Reducing the power of the police will reduce racist violence. In light of 2020's paradigm-shifting discourse around systemic racism and calls to defund the police, imagining alternatives to policing is key in creating a more livable Portland. The Portland Police Bureau has a history of surveilling and harassing Black communities within the city (Serbulo and Gibson 2013).

Unsurprisingly, today the Portland police are more likely to stop and use force against Black

Portlanders relative to other groups (Campbell 2020). A review of the data on police shooting

deaths in Portland between 2004 and 2014 shows that 30 percent of individuals killed by police

in this time span were people of color—mostly African American, which is disproportionate

given that African Americans make up only 6 percent of the population in the city (Bates and

Curry-Stevens 2014). Reducing the power and resources available to the Portland police will

make the city quite literally more livable for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Portlanders. Rather

than funneling public funds toward an already inflated police system, the reallocation of money

toward social infrastructure that prevents crime and police encounters such as education, mental

health programs, jobs, affordable housing, and crisis assistance programs will create conditions

for a safer and more equitable city.

Final Thoughts

This project captures the perspectives and experiences of Portlanders of color before the

COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. and murder of George Floyd. Given the gravity of these events

and subsequent uprisings in 2020 in response to systemic racial violence, the racial, economic,

and political landscape of Portland has changed greatly since this time. In 2021, demand for real

estate in downtown Portland plummeted due to changing public perceptions of the city

connected to widely broadcasted images of protests and wildfires in the state during the summer

of 2020 (Jacquiss 2021). Ongoing protests have left POC activists and community organizers

both inspired and exhausted. Protests in Portland and Black Lives Matter activism have

addressed Portland's racist "elephant in the room" at the national level, leading to cuts to police

budgets, increased interest in police alternatives, and a voter-approved overhaul of the officer

oversight committee (Levinson and Olmos 2020). However, movement-building in Portland has also struggled to maintain its original focus on anti-Black racism and police brutality due intragroup conflicts and co-optation by largely white anti-establishment protestors (Levinson and Olmos 2020). Even though I could not capture participant perspectives of these events due to the timing of this project, I hope that findings presented here shed light on long-simmering emotions and the deep well of racial trauma that undergirds this historic moment of racial reckoning. While the murder of George Floyd brought issues of systemic racism into mainstream public discourse, these issues are not new to Black and communities of color. As such, this project provides a window into everyday and systemic forms of racism that have, in part, fueled the engines of resistance that emerged in the summer of 2020 and beyond.

While the history and unique character of racism in Portland are in many ways specific to the region, this project is not a condemnation of Portland or the state of Oregon. Rather, I focus on Portland as a microcosm of the U.S. racial power structure. The city of Portland reflects some of America's deepest contradictions, defined by the struggle between aspirations of freedom and equality of and deep-seated violence and injustice. This project grapples with tensions that have haunted American society for centuries, which find their way into the everyday lives of individuals. I center the perspectives of people of color to analyze the problem of U.S. racism, but also to capture the nuanced ways power operates in the lives of those who experience marginalization. In this sense, the project is not only about racism, but also other of manifestations of power that keep individuals from feeling at ease in their communities, homes, and bodies. The ultimate calling of this project and critical race scholarship, I believe, is to build a society where communities of color and other marginalized groups can live free from physical, symbolic, and psychological violence.

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