

STUDY ON WHITE PEOPLE

The Reminiscences of

Jenny McQueen

INCITE

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jenny McQueen conducted by Whitney Dow on January 26, 2018. This interview is part of the Study on White People.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Jenny McQueen

Location: Richmond, VA

Interviewer: Whitney Dow

Date: January 26, 2018

Q: So, can you just tell me your name, where you're from, and a little about yourself?

McQueen: [15:21:50] And the from, you want where I am—like, where I live currently or where I grew up?

Q: You know, where you are—where you live currently.

McQueen: [15:21:56] Okay. My name's Jenny McQueen. I'm from Richmond, Virginia. I am a photographer here, and I'm married, and that's the important stuff. (laughs)

Q: I'm going to actually do one more thing with this—

McQueen: Go for it.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So, obviously, from your first answer—that you grew up in someplace different. Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like?

McQueen: [15:22:33] Yeah, so, I grew up in a small town, Stevens Point, Wisconsin. It's right in the center of Wisconsin, about an hour and a half north of Madison [Wisconsin]. And it's a town of just under 25,000 people. Really small, really friendly. Not diverse at all. Pretty quiet, pretty safe childhood.

Q: And did you—do you—because it was not diverse or anything, do you—did you think about race at all? Was race something that was in your mind growing up?

McQueen: [15:23:01] Race was a conversation that was kind of, I guess, on the peripheral now and then. We had a couple of African American folks in town that were friends of ours, so maybe anecdotally now and then, but never a real conversation about, you know, what it means to be a person of color or what their experience might be like. I think any opinion that I had was probably something from a movie or, you know—it just wasn't something we talked or thought about.

Q: And do you remember when you first became aware of your own race?

McQueen: [15:23:41] First became—my own—that's a good question. Let me think about that for a second. I think I first became really aware of being white when I moved to Virginia, the fact that that is a different experience than being black. I really can't think of an a-ha moment

when I was younger. And so, I moved to Virginia when I was eighteen. So, to me, that feels pretty late to be having this realization that I'm white and that, you know, that means something. But, you know, that's probably when I first thought about it.

Q: And can you tell me a little bit [about that?] experience? What was different about it? What made you think about it, and what were your—the things that became this realization for you?

McQueen: [15:24:34] The moment where I realized that being white meant something—can I start that over? The moment that I realized that I was white and that people looked at people of color differently was about a month after I moved to Virginia. I got a waitressing job, and some of my coworkers were looking at pictures with me of my high school friends, and one of my friends from high school was African American. And since we never talked about race growing up, it wasn't something that I thought about. And one of my girlfriends from Virginia said, "Does your dad allow you to date black people?" And I was so shocked that that was a question. I was offended that that was a question, but I had never thought that that would be a rule, that somebody's parents wouldn't allow them to date black people. So, that's—that was the first moment that I felt like just totally blindsided that people think that way.

Q: What was your response?

McQueen: [15:25:33] I just said, "Of course, doesn't yours?" (laughs)

Q: And in what other ways was Virginia different for you, and how did it sort of inform your views on race and your own race?

McQueen: [15:25:47] Virginia has a huge focus on Civil War history. The chapter of history that comes from Civil War and slavery was very brief, you know, growing up in the Midwest. And so, it was looked at as this part of history that we're not really proud of. We don't spend a lot of time focusing on it. That's in the past, let's keep going. When I moved to Virginia and I realized that there's a lot of people who are really proud of being from the South and proud of growing up having maybe family connected to fighting for the South, and I started to see how that connects to their attitudes about race, that was pretty shocking.

Q: And so, you've—did you go to school here? [So?], did you move here [to go to?] school?

McQueen: [15:26:44] I moved to Virginia for Virginia Commonwealth University.

Q: When you think about yourself now, how would you—because you said the important things—you're a photographer, you're a wife. What was the third one?

McQueen: [15:27:05] I don't—I'm—something I consider—I'm a business owner. I consider that—pretty important part of my identity.

Q: So, the—are those sort of like the three big things in your identity? Or how would you describe your—the [unclear] identity and—yeah.

McQueen: [15:27:19] My identity I would describe as I'm the oldest sister, so that is definitely a huge part of who I am, my role in the family, as being the oldest. I am—I'm self-made, I'm—like, I work really hard and I consider that to kind of fold into being a business owner. That's a big part of my identity. And a couple of things that don't go together: I'm liberal, but I'm a Christian. So, I'm really vocal about that, that I am extremely left-leaning, and that's what I think Jesus would have been if he was here today. So, that's a big part of my identity, too, which sometimes confuses people. And then, yes, being a business owner and a photographer—I'd say creativity is a major component of who I am.

Q: It's interesting, you didn't mention either your gender or your race. Do that—are those things that don't fit into your—sort of how you think about yourself in—on a day-to-day basis, or the—they're not that important to you?

McQueen: I would say that my gender—I love being a woman, so I do think that does have something to do with my identity. It's—I just don't lead with it. I don't think it's the first thing that I think of. Being white, it doesn't naturally occur to me as part of my identity, even though I know that it does factor into that. It's just not something that immediately comes to mind when you ask me to describe myself.

Q: Why do you think it doesn't come to your mind? Because when I think—when people see you, they don't see business owner, they don't see photographer, they don't see Christian, they don't see liberal. They don't see any of the—all the things that are important to you, they don't

see. The first two things they see about you is that you're a woman and you're white. So, why are those things you've—and so, that's the starting point of the interaction. Why do you think that there's—that those things don't occur to you?

McQueen: [15:29:18] The reason being white and being a woman, I think, don't occur to me right away off the top of my head when I'm talking about identity is because I feel like most of my identity comes from, like, who I am inside, not what I look like. And I think if you asked other people to describe me, they would use those things. They would probably say, "She's really tall," and, you know, "she's—this is what she looks like." When I think of the word identity, I think, though, of what's inside my head, not what I look like.

Q: And what is it that makes you white, or makes someone white?

McQueen: [15:29:59] Skin color is what makes you white. Your genetics, I think, is what makes you white.

Q: And do you think that you've gotten any benefits from being white? You've received any benefits at all?

McQueen: [15:30:14] Unfortunately, I do think I get benefits from being white. Working in an industry where I have to go win my clients over, win their trust to get them to pay me; I think that I am probably trusted a little bit easier than people of color. And I've become more aware of that, like, as I pay attention. That's not something that I really thought about until the last couple

of years. So, I think one of the benefits of being somebody who looks, you know, like the majority of everybody else in the States is that I win trust a little bit easier. Other benefits would just be—there's probably benefits that I'm not even aware of. There's—I'm sure that there's things—that I have, you know, privilege or benefits because of my skin color that I'll never know or that is a blind spot to me right now. But there is—definitely benefits. I wish that wasn't true.

Q: Are there any drawbacks to being white?

McQueen: [15:31:14] I can't think of any specific drawbacks to being white, but I would say that something I think is a weakness in white culture or white families is that we're not raised with the tools to talk about race. So, the conversations can be really uncomfortable. If I try to talk to my, you know, siblings or my parents about race, it can get really awkward really fast. And I think it's because we just aren't given the tools. We don't—I guess because we don't have to talk about it, we don't. So, that would be one of the drawbacks, is that we're just not equipped. And I don't think that's because of my skin color. I think that's because of how—I think that's the atmosphere that I was raised in.

Q: And can you tell me a little more about your community? You said it was very, very homogenized, like mostly white. There was one black—a couple of black families that you knew.

McQueen: [15:32:09] Yes. So, the town that I grew up in was mainly white. There was a pretty significant Hmong? [phonetic] population. It actually was a place that—a lot of first generation Hmong? families were immigrating to. So, that was the only real factor as far as diversity goes. But the majority of the families were Polish or German. That was the town. And so, very homogenous as far as the skin color goes.

Q: And you say your parents didn't really talk about race. It wasn't sort of a—that wasn't something that was sort of part of the conversation. Are they—because it sounds—we talk about that they have a little different worldview than you do. Are they more conservative than you? Are they—

McQueen: [15:32:56] My parents are more conservative than I am. Definitely politically. The thing that has caused the big conversations—come up with us is that I married an African American man. And so, now, this is my family, too. So, I bring up topics that they either never thought about, or the opinions that they have are kind of surface level, and they haven't spent a lot of time thinking about it. So, that's not to downplay, you know, their feelings or their opinions, but they just haven't had to witness it or, you know, sit and talk about it with somebody like I have. So, that's, I think, where the big split has happened.

Q: Did they accept your husband into the family? Was it an issue when you decided to marry an African American?

McQueen: [15:33:47] There was no issue with my dating or marrying an African American man. They treat him like their son, they love him. The issue for me is that I want an understanding or an empathy, especially when I think about having kids, when I think about the fact that I'm going to be raising, you know, black children, and my parents are going to be their grandparents. I want them to understand that that's going to be very different from having white grandchildren. And I want there to be some kind of awareness there.

Q: And how do you feel about raising black children as—having children that don't look like you. Is that something that concerns you, you think about?

McQueen: [15:34:28] I'm not concerned about my children not looking like me. I am concerned about the atmosphere, especially in the South, particularly towards black males. I'm concerned about what that means. I think I'll have a lot of fears as a mom, and it's actually one of the reasons that my husband and I want to move to the Pacific Northwest, is because we don't really want to raise African American children here.

Q: Is your husband from Richmond?

McQueen: [15:34:56] My husband is from Alexandria, Virginia. So, north of here, north of the Mason-Dixon line. (laughs)

Q: Did you date for a long time before you got married?

McQueen: [15:35:09] My husband and I dated for almost six years before we got married. So, we dated a long time.

Q: And before you dated your husband, had you had relationships with people of other races? Or were most of your boyfriends white? Was it mixed, mixture?

McQueen: [15:35:25] Before I dated my husband, I had one other African American boyfriend, and then I dated white men. So, it was mixed.

Q: And do you feel that people treated you differently depending on who you were in a romantic relationship with?

McQueen: [15:35:39] I wasn't treated differently, but—well, let me start that over. I wasn't treated differently when I was dating African American men, but my friends, my white friends, would ask a lot of questions. So, I would get questions like what is it like to date a black man? Or just—a lot of curiosities. I think it was almost seen as eclectic, especially from my friends from Wisconsin. So, I wasn't treated differently. Just a lot of intrigue.

Q: [Like?], what was it like—what's it like? (laughs)

McQueen: [15:36:12] Yes. It's like dating a man.

Q: Yes.

McQueen: [15:36:16] It's dating a man, yes.

Q: And even—and have you had—have you experienced any discrimination in Richmond being an interracial couple in Richmond?

McQueen: [15:36:27] I don't feel like I've experienced discrimination dating a black man or being in an interracial relationship. I have had experiences where I've noticed people maybe giving us a look. It's generally older people. It's not really something that I pay attention to or look for. In fact, I would say that a lot of times, it's when I'm—when I—we're out with other people that somebody else will say, "Did you see that man just glaring at you two?" It's not something that happens very frequently, and I really wouldn't care if it did. (laughs)

Q: Yeah, it's also interesting that you're married to a black man and that that's also—you don't think about your race that often. Do you not think about it in the context of the relationship? Or you just don't think about it in general?

McQueen: [15:37:14] I think about my race a lot in general, because I feel like I've really been working to understand it and understand, you know, what that means being both in an interracial relationship and that I'm going to be raising kids that look differently from me. So, I do think about it a lot from, I guess, like, a self-education standpoint. It's not something that I think about as a part of my identity, and I think that's just because I haven't had to.

Q: Well, it's interesting, you know, you clearly don't think of yourself as a Southerner, you're—

McQueen: No.

Q: Yeah, no.

McQueen: [15:37:50] I am not a Southerner.

Q: But your husband is a Southerner.

McQueen: [15:37:53] No, my husband would not call himself a Southerner, either. He's from—

Q: [unclear] from Virginia.

McQueen: [15:37:57] Alexandria is a suburb of D.C., so—

Q: [unclear]

McQueen: [15:38:00] And he would be very—if he were here, he would be very adamant about that, too. He's not a Southerner.

Q: And so, what is it—does he think of himself as a Northerner? Suburbanite?

McQueen: [15:38:14] Suburbanite, yeah. A city boy. I don't think he would—I don't—no, he wouldn't say Northerner. He would just be very adamant that he is not from the South.

Q: Because Alexandria is a very white community, right?

McQueen: [15:38:26] I'm actually not sure about that. Right now, I really don't know. Whenever we go up there, we just see his family and leave. So, I don't think I can really answer that.

(laughter)

Q: In thinking about—oh, first of all, one other thing: are you happy you're white?

McQueen: [15:38:46] I'm happy with how I look, so I guess you could say I'm happy that I'm white, if you, you know, fold that in. I still wish it didn't give me a benefit. I hesitate to say I'm happy I'm white because I feel like that comes off as I'm glad I'm not these other things. And that's not the case. I just—I'm happy with who I am.

Q: You wish it didn't give you a benefit. Why don't—why are you not happy that you get a benefit from your race?

McQueen: [15:39:28] I'm not happy that I get a benefit from my race because that means that other people get a disadvantage from their race. It means that because things, you know, might work in my favor or I never have to think about my skin color that there are people who—things work against them, and they do have to think about their skin color. I wish it was all truly an

equal playing field, and that we—that what we got in life was simply because of what we did. I wish that was the case.

Q: And does it impact the way that you—one of the things you said, “I’m a self-made person, I’m this.” Do you—does knowing that you get a benefit or thinking that you get a benefit change how you feel about your own accomplishments?

McQueen: [15:40:14] I still feel proud of my accomplishments, and I don’t think it takes away from what I’ve done or what I feel like I’ve accomplished. I think that, in some ways, I probably did have a step up. But admitting that I have some type of privilege or some type of benefit that’s somewhat automatic, I don’t think that takes away from the work I’ve done or from what I’ve built for myself. And I think that if I were not white, I would have had to work harder than I did, and I would have had to, you know, overcome a lot more. I still think I would have done it, though. So, I don’t think that it changes how I feel about those things.

Q: Makes me feel like I should have done a lot more, (laughter) [unclear] accomplished a lot more. You know, obviously, the—you know, in Richmond, being—and you talked a little bit about this, about people’s connectedness to the past. What are your—you know, what are your thoughts on the whole monument debate, because we’re just a couple blocks away from Monument Ave. We’re staying right across from Jackson—obviously it’s a big point of discussion in this community.

McQueen: [15:41:37] I think you don't have to have a monument to remember history, and if those monuments represent something painful to somebody, I have no problem having them removed and put in the museum. The thing that concerns me is if we go through the steps and spend the money to take the monuments down, I'm worried that the majority of people in Richmond are going to be, like, "Look, we fixed it! We're not racist anymore!" So, that would be my only hesitation as far as removing the monuments, as there's a lot of other problems that we need to solve, as well. So, it's not a Band-Aid. But if—yeah, I think the monuments need to go. I do.

Q: But what monuments? Like, what monuments need to go? Because there's a lot of monuments in this country.

McQueen: [15:42:24] There are a lot of monuments in this country. I think that a monument that represents a painful history to a group of people, a large group of people, needs to go. I'm not educated enough on Civil War history to tell you what every monument in Richmond means. So, I would say, off the top of my head, that the Stonewall Jackson and the Robert E. Lee statues need to go. But, again, I'm not Southern, so if you asked me to list every statue that's up and down Monument Avenue, I wouldn't be able to.

Q: What about the Arthur Ashe statue? (laughter)

McQueen: [15:43:01] Yes, Arthur Ashe hitting children with tennis rackets. (laughter) [That's what it?]
—I believe that Arthur Ashe is something that Richmond is proud of, and that represents a positive part of history. So, I think Arthur Ashe can stay.

Q: As white people living in 2018, we know that there's a really complex, not-so-great history. People who are proud of the South would agree that a lot of our history was not so wonderful. Do we, as white people, owe black people something because of that?

McQueen: [15:43:45] I think that we have a responsibility to try and reset the scales. I think we have a responsibility to try and make it a little more fair. And the reality is that we as white people have benefited off of black and Native American people. You know, the country was really built on the backs of African Americans. And then, going all the way up into the '70s and probably even more, I'm not educated enough to say the statistics, but things like unfair housing practices and who was getting the bank loans and stuff like that, it's not an even playing field. It wasn't, and it still isn't. So, I do think we have a responsibility to at least do the research to say, well, this is what it would look like. People freak out when you use the word—what is the word I'm looking for?

Q: Reparations?

McQueen: [15:44:45] Reparations, thank you. People kind of panic when you mention reparations. I think we have a responsibility to at least look into what does that look like, and

really how unfair were things that set up the way that wealth is today. So, it's not really about owing, it's just about doing the right thing.

Q: You know, I think it's—I think the same thing, it's sort of an interesting—the same thing, we talk about the monuments and talk about—and think about this conversation, like, what is our connection to the past? What is our relationship to the past, what's our obligation to the past, and how—what do we own, what don't we own? It's a really complicated question. Now, is it—where'd you say you were moving?

McQueen: [15:45:39] My husband I want to move to Seattle.

Q: Seattle. And is this, like, the racial promised land? Like, what is—like, have you been to Washington?

McQueen: Yes.

Q: Do you know, like—what, like—

McQueen: [15:45:48] Yes, we've been to Seattle. There's a few things that are pulling us out there; for sure the job economy. My husband works in tech. The creative community out there seems amazing. Another thing that we notice, though, is that it's definitely more diverse. It's not binary where it's, like, there's—you know, there's a huge white population and a huge black population. There is, from what we can tell when we were out there and from the statistics we've

read, it's extremely diverse as in [you] meet people from truly all over the world. Another thing that we really liked that we noticed during our time there is that it's also diverse as far as age within the community. So, if you, you know, go out to hear a band, there might be people, you know, spanning, like, three or four generations hanging out together, and they're happy to be there. They're happy to be together, and they just, you know, have this thing in common. And so, I'm really attracted to that it's diverse in more than one way. So, that's kind of—those would be, like, the big things that are pulling us out there.

Q: The weather's not that diverse. (laughter)

McQueen: [15:46:46] I like rain, so (laughs) I'm going to be all right. (laughs)

Q: You're not planning on moving back to Stevens Point?

McQueen: [15:46:52] No. My husband would not like the cold weather.

Q: So, what compelled you to get involved in this project? Yeah, how do you find out about it, what would—like, made you want to, like, take an eighteen-page survey, and—

McQueen: [15:47:07] (laughs) I belong to a discussion group that gets together to talk about race and faith and kind of how that plays out in the church. And one of the women in my group shared the survey with us. And I'm always interested in talking about this, I think, anything that furthers the discussion about race is important. So, that's what made me take the survey.

Q: And how is the experience of going through taking the survey? Did you learn anything? Did it change your opinions? Did it, like, spark any thought? Was it boring, good, bad?

McQueen: [15:47:40] Some of the questions were hard to answer, because either I had never thought about it or I just wasn't sure. Some of the stuff that has to do with, like, trusting the government and stuff like that, I'm really, like, not totally sure about my answers. I'd say a couple of the questions surprised me. You can definitely see how, if you don't stop to think about it and, you know, you're kind of going through the survey, it does poke at your own bias a little bit. Some of the questions about, you know, how would you feel about living in a neighborhood that's, you know, all whatever the demographic. And a couple of them, I was surprised that I stopped to think about it. Like, is this a factor? So, I'd say it made me at least think about maybe there's some, you know, work I still have to do.

Q: Yeah, I think—and I think it's hard to be honest with yourself sometimes, and it's, like, you're doing the survey and you know it's anonymous, but it's, like—and so, you want to answer honestly, and then—but you're still stuck with the answer, (laughter) right, whether or not it's anonymous or not. You're stuck with the answer. And [what am I going to?] ask you? So, was there a specific thing that you want to address in this conversation, or something that you thought would—better be—it's important to be said in the context of this conversation?

McQueen: [15:49:17] I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I think it's an important conversation to have, though, because most white people don't think about being white. I told

my family that I was coming here to do this, and literally, the response was exactly I've never thought about it. I'm just white. And, to me, I feel like that's the pretty common instinct when you're part of the majority culture. So, I just—even leading up to today, thinking about, like, what would I say? What would I talk about? It's, you know, you kind of draw a blank there.

Q: Well, you certainly aren't drawing a blank on any of these questions. (laughter) Are the questions kind of what you thought they'd be? Or they—

McQueen: [15:49:57] I think they are. One of my friends filmed with you guys, and I decided not to ask her what the questions were, because I didn't want to, like, rehearse anything. But I think my biggest concern was just saying something that came across as ignorant or could be played out in a way that just sounds really privileged. And I feel like I'm doing the work to not walk around with a lot of blind spots. I know I still have them, but I—especially since I'm now married into an African American family, I try to be really careful about how I come across.

Q: Has your husband's family accepted you?

McQueen: [15:50:38] My husband's family has been awesome. They're so good to me. They—I have never felt uncomfortable or like I'm different at all. They don't treat me any differently than any members of their family. And they've really made me feel nothing but welcome. They're really great people.

Q: And what about their extended community? Have you had any push—have they experienced anything with, oh, like, “Oh your son’s married a white girl” or—

McQueen: [15:51:07] Not that I know of, or if they have, they’ve never let it get back to me. Now, I’ve never heard anything—his grandparents, his—he has a lot of cousins, aunts, and uncles. They all just—they’re so good to me. So, there has been—I would say that neither of us have come up against any friction in our families.

Q: Have you ever consciously taken advantage of the fact that you’re white to get something you want or be in the space in a particular way or anything?

McQueen: [15:51:44] I don’t think I’ve ever consciously taken advantage of being white. I think that sometimes when I’m in a space where I am the minority—and I think that not being afraid to go into those spaces sometimes and be the only white person, that sometimes I get a little bit more attention. It’s almost kind of like being the anomaly. I wouldn’t say that that’s taking advantage, and I’ve actually never really thought about that until now. But, you know, not being afraid to go into place like, maybe—like, dance clubs or restaurants or something like that where the other white people are afraid to go into, sometimes—I don’t really know how to finish that thought. It’s just—

Q: I mean, I think sometimes in a way it’s, like, you know, I have a sense of myself or the way that I appear to people. And maybe it’s totally delusional, but I feel like I know how to use how I look to get what I want, like, in certain situations where I’m going to a hotel or a restaurant or a

business situation, that I know that people project certain things on me, and I'm able to—I'm very, very conscious that at times I manipulate that to be in the space the way that I want to be in it, you know?

McQueen: [15:53:21] I would say that I take more advantage of being a female, and sometimes of my height. Those are the two things that I would say I specifically take advantage of. If I need to be assertive, I'm definitely taking advantage of my height. If I need something—and this isn't true so much anymore, but when I used to bartend, I absolutely—I made money off the fact that I was a woman, and I knew that. So, those are things I'd say I've specifically taken advantage of. It never entered my mind that it was because I was white. But, again, I think that plays into the factor that it was probably a benefit, and I just wasn't aware of it.

Q: And again, I don't know if I asked you this already, but has being—is being white or being a woman—had a bigger impact on your life?

McQueen: [15:54:10] I think being a woman has had the biggest impact on my life. I'd say being a woman has had a bigger impact on my identity than being white. I think you do have to think about being a woman. You have to think about what, you know, where is it safe for you to go? How are you coming across? It's such a big package that comes with that. I just—again, I don't—when you ask me about identity, like, being white doesn't immediately come to mind. If you ask me about how I look, you know, to me, that's a different thing.

Q: Well, I think identity is kind of the intersection of how you feel about yourself [and perceive?] [unclear] of navigating this, like, line there. And how you perceive yourself is usually so completely out of whack with [how people process?] [unclear]

McQueen: [Right?].

Q: (laughs) So, what about faith? Oh, where are we on time?

F: Oh, we've been going for about thirty, thirty-five minutes.

Q: Okay. You're—clearly faith is important to you. You've brought it up a number of times. How does that—what religion are you? What's the church like that you're in, what's the congregation look like, what denomination?

McQueen: [15:55:29] So, I'm a Christian. I attend a church that belongs to the Assembly of God denomination. I'm not a member there. I am pretty involved, though. I do like the church. What's interesting about it is that I didn't know until I'd attended there for two years that it was an Assembly of God church. It's very autonomous, I guess. Maybe not behind the scenes, but from my point of view, it seems like it's a non-denominational church and, yeah, faith plays a really big role in who I am and how I live, for sure.

Q: And is the—what's the congregation look like? Is it homogenous, homogenized congregation?

McQueen: [15:56:10] The congregation at my church is pretty homogenous. I wish it was more diverse. In fact, it's something that I frequently bring up. I email our pastor about things once in a while that we can do to improve the experience of the minorities and hopefully, you know, attract people that will make our congregation more diverse. But, no, our congregation is not diverse at all.

Q: Does your husband attend, as well?

McQueen: [15:56:34] Sporadically.

Q: (laughs) The—and is either the idea—I've talked to a lot of different people that church is a place that they first encountered analyzing white supremacy or, you know, white privilege. Is it part of the practice of the church to address issues of whiteness?

McQueen: [15:57:07] My church hasn't spent a lot of time addressing anything to do with whiteness or racism until it started to happen in the media. When Charlottesville happened, they addressed it. There have been a couple of different things that have brought it up. And I think since those things that my pastor has really been making an effort. I can see, you know, that they have brought some African American pastors to speak at our church, and I think that being visible from the pulpit is a really big part of addressing equality. And so, there's been that, and I'm really happy to see that. But, in general, I don't think we address the race issue nearly enough.

Q: Why do you think that that hour on Sunday is so segregated still? Because the people that I speak to that are religious all talk a lot about racial issues and coming together and having the shared values of religion, why is it so intractably segregated?

McQueen: [15:58:11] Sunday morning is really segregated. I don't completely know the answer as to why. I think part of it has to do with worship styles. I think that people like to be in their comfort zone, and so, you know, you throw in a couple of gospel songs on Sunday morning at my church and, you know, and that might be confusing. That might be out of their comfort zone. So, I think comfort has a big part to do with it. And then, unfortunately, I think a lot of white people see talking about race and talking about issues of social justice as politically left, and they don't want that. They don't want politics on Sunday morning. And since they see race as a political issue, you know, stuff that kind of opens the floor to that makes them really uncomfortable, and so it's just not addressed. And if it's never addressed, then we can't do stuff that, you know, that'll welcome, you know, people who don't look like us. And so, it's just—it just stays how it is.

Q: How is race a political issue?

McQueen: [15:59:06] I don't think race is a political issue, at least not for me. I think it's a life issue. I think for a lot of people, race has become part of a package deal when you factor it into politics. It's such a talking point of the Democrats that the Republicans, since they push back on everything that the Democrats do, I think that they have felt like they need to push back, you

know, as part of the package. That's the only thing that I can think of, is it's just, you know, it comes with the—it comes with signing up to be a Republican.

Q: And, I mean, how does it work that the church, which has been, you know, in the past like our government has been sort of involved in perpetuating structural racism and justifying it? How can that then be a tool for deconstructing it?

McQueen: [16:00:06] The church has been complicit in furthering—can you repeat the question one more time? Sorry.

Q: [Well, simply just what?] you were going to say, that the church has been complicit in perpetuating structural racism—

McQueen: Yes, okay.

Q: —in history.

McQueen: Yes.

Q: So, how can it actually be part of the deconstruction of it?

McQueen: [16:00:25] Because the church has been complicit in furthering structural racism—the way the church was complicit in furthering structural racism is by keeping quiet. They didn't

vocalize it, they didn't stand up against it. And so, the way that they can help deconstruct it is by now, you know, talking about it, addressing it, admitting they were wrong, and basically opening the floor to say what can we do better? If they can speak up and admit the fact that they were wrong and, you know, that we had a big role in this, I think that's how we move forward and start to dismantle any type of structural racism, whether it's in the church or in society, whatever.

Q: You know, we talked about the comfort zone and worship styles. Is segregation, self-segregation de facto negative?

McQueen: [16:01:13] I don't know. I really don't know. That's a hard question, because I have heard a lot of my friends who are people of color say that Sunday morning feels like a safe space for them. And so, if they're—if they need that, then I can't say that that's a negative thing. I think that, yeah, that's pretty much it. I really don't know.

Q: Yeah, I mean, I wonder sometimes. I think there's sort of this default, if you're left, to say that any sort of segregation is negative, and—whether it's, like, the lunchroom or a church. And—

McQueen: [16:01:51] I will say that I feel like Sunday morning or any experience, really, is better when we have diverse voices, whether it's, you know, who we're learning from, who we're spending time with, or who we're worshipping, or how we're worshipping on Sunday morning. Any type of diversity adds to what we're getting out of it. So, [yeah?]. (laughs)

Q: Is there anything that you—

F: Yeah, I was sort of thinking, you know, you said that growing up, your family didn't give you the tools to speak about race, and that you're not going to have that option when you have your children. You're going to have to [unclear] tools. What, in your mind—you know, what are you going to teach them? What is that conversation going to be like, and what do you wish that your parents had given to you?

McQueen: [16:02:42] I don't really know yet how I'm going to talk to my kids about race. I feel like I have a lot to learn yet before I'm ready to be a mom specifically for that reason. I do know that it's going to be a factor in how other people look at them, and so—whereas, if I had white kids, you know, I wouldn't have to have a conversation with them about how to behave when a police officer pulls them over. You know, we might address manners, but we're not going to have to talk about, you know, what to do, you know, if a police officer gets violent with you. And that is a conversation that I'm going to have to have with my black children. I don't feel like I'm ready for that. It makes me really sad to even think about it. So, I don't really know yet what the tools are, and that's part of the reason that I'm, you know, joining things like these discussion groups, so that I can learn from other people who've done that. Does that answer the question?

F: Yeah, [and I guess I'm curious?], you know, from your husband, do you feel like he—his parents talked to him more about race as he was growing up?

McQueen: [16:03:41] My husband's parents—oh, I'm not sure I want to go into that. I think my husband is more equipped to talk about race than I am. I'm not really sure it was a huge topic of conversation as much as it was just part of the experience of just, you know, being an African American man or boy.

Q: When you say you don't want to go into—[it's?] because of his family or because of his experiences?

McQueen: [16:04:07] His family. We're going to talk a lot more, I think, in our house. But that's just in general.

Q: How—when you have these, you know, these mythical children (laughter) [unclear] these, you know, TBD [to be determined] children, (laughter) how do you want them to connect to their whiteness? Because they're going to be half-white, half-black.

McQueen: [16:04:33] We want to adopt, too. So, not entirely sure what the identity of all of—the racial identity of all of our kids are going to be yet. But as far as biological kids...so, let me think about that. So, my husband took my last name, and my last name—in my family, we can trace back three hundred years, and there is definitely a big emphasis on family lineage there and the history that comes with that. And so, I am definitely going to make sure that my kids, you know, get to connect to that. If that is connecting to whiteness, then I guess that that would be my answer. I just know that the outside world is not going to view them as white, so we'll probably

spend more time focusing on what it means to be a black person in America, because that's probably how they're going to experience things.

Q: Well, you know, when I started the project and Barack Obama was president, [unclear] is Barack Obama black or white? And people said, "Well, he's black." And I'd be—and I'm always, like, confused that if you're half-white and half-black—and, like, and—

McQueen: [16:05:46] You're black, yeah.

Q: He's raised by white family, went to white institutions, lives in the White House, you know? (laughter) It's—like, what makes him black? Why is he black? And, you know, it's kind of a—you know, it's—you know, a—kind of a throwaway question in a way. But, yeah, like, how do you then give them access to you, to your heritage, who you're bringing as their mother? And they're birthright is that as much as your husband's family—and how do you then give them ownership of that three hundred years of history, of their family?

McQueen: [16:06:26] The fact that we took my last name is a big way that we're passing ownership on. The connection that I have to my father's side of the family is huge. It's really important to me, and it was his idea to do that. But the—I would say, absolutely, the last name is the way that we're going to pass that connection on to them. They're definitely going to know what it means to be a McQueen.

Q: Can you tell me, like, what was that—the idea that he took your name. How—that's a, you know—

McQueen: [16:06:54] Yeah, it's unusual.

Q: For a man—

McQueen: (laughs) Yeah.

Q: —that's, like—

McQueen: Yeah.

Q: —that's big. That's—

McQueen: Yeah.

Q: —like, you found, like, a good guy, [do you think?]?

McQueen: I did.

Q: That's a big—

McQueen: [16:07:00] I did, and it was his idea. He—so, he came up with the idea to take my last name because I have no brothers. I have no male cousins. Not first cousins, anyway. And he just knew what it meant to me. He knew that my grandparents on my dad's side have a huge part to do with who I am, and it just—it means a lot to me. I'm really proud of that last name, and I hadn't made the decision yet on whether or not I was going to take his when he decided to do that. And, yeah, we called my dad on Father's Day to tell him that that's what we were doing. And he has had no hesitation at—I mean, he immediately changed his name on Facebook and everything. (laughs) So, it's been really fun, and it's been really interesting to watch people's reactions, because I really thought that there was nothing new under the sun at this point that would be seen as truly untraditional, and it is. People are shocked.

Q: I love it.

McQueen: [16:08:02] (laughs) I do, too. (laughs)

Q: That's awesome. And how—what was your father's reaction to that?

McQueen: [16:08:09] He was really touched, and my dad's not somebody who reacts emotionally to a lot of stuff. But he was really touched, and my whole family, my aunts and uncles—and my grandparents had passed away before we got married, but my entire family is extremely excited about that.

Q: I have three daughters. I'm going to have to, like, pitch this idea.

McQueen: Yeah. (laughs)

Q: This—

McQueen: [16:08:33] Do it. (laughs)

Q: So, as we're sort of, you know, at the end of our time here, is there anything that we didn't talk about that you think is really important to be said in the context of this conversation?

McQueen: [16:08:47] I would say something important to keep in mind, especially for white people, is just that color blindness doesn't work, because when we say we don't see color, we're saying that we don't see our friends of color and what their experience is like. So, color blindness is just—we tried it in the '90s, it did not work. It's still not working. And so, we've got to do something different. I'd say that's the thing that I think about a lot.

Q: So, what we're going to do now is we're going to just take some stills of you, so—

McQueen: Okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Great, thank you so much.

McQueen: [16:10:29] Okay? All set? Thank you.

Q: This was really—we really appreciate you coming in. [16:10:34]

[END OF INTERVIEW]