

E7: How White Parents and Caregivers Can Become Antiracist (Part 2 of 3)

Co-hosts: SooJin Pate and Hannah Carney

Guest: Mary Moriarty

Intro (music by Mike Myth Productions):

SooJin: Welcome to the Antiracist Parenting Podcast, where we're working to create an antiracist world for ourselves, our children, and future generations to come.

Hannah: We are Hannah Carney and SooJin Pate. And we're coming to you not as experts but as parents who want to share our missteps and successes on raising antiracist children. Thank you for being on this journey with us, as we work together to build a community of antiracist parents who are raising a generation of antiracist kids.

SooJin: Welcome to episode seven, where we continue our three-part series on how white parents and caregivers become antiracist. In the last episode, we heard from Dr. Kathleen Devore, professor of English at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, who broke down how toxic, dysfunctional, and unwell whiteness and white supremacy makes us, all of us regardless of skin color. She shared that her commitment to being antiracist began during her Peace Corps years when she taught in South Africa, witnessing the government assault on Black people as cops threw out Black South Africans from 13 story buildings only to frame these murders as suicides. And when she returned to the States after that experience, she realized that South Africa's treatment of Black people and Brown people were very, eerily similar to how the U.S. government and white Americans treat Black and Brown people here. And instead of knowing that and doing nothing about it, she did something with her knowledge, her awareness. As she said, once you know something, you can't unknow it. So what are you going to do with your awareness? Too many white people, as Kathleen pointed out, continue on with "business as usual" – content with their denial and inaction. But, quote, "to not act on what we know is killing us every day," as she wisely points out. So whiteness kills, whiteness harms, whiteness makes individuals and the collective unwell. So what's the elixir, the antidote to white supremacy, to the ills of whiteness? Antiracism. So we continue our three-part series today with another special guest, who will be talking about how she came to commit to being an antiracist. Before we get to that, it's time for our accountability check in – where Hannah and I check in about the commitments we made from the last episode. So Hannah, can you remind our listeners what commitments you made and update us on how that's going?

Hannah: So I had committed to making a monthly donation to Makoce Ikukcupi, which is also known as the Dakota Land Recovery Project, which I've done. Thank you, SooJin – I did not know about that. And I also committed to sharing this organization with the Social Justice Book Club that I facilitate. And I will

do that on my next communication that goes out. And I also committed to start thinking about how to gather more information from white people around what holds us back and this effort is in process.

SooJin: Oh, great. I love that. So you're starting kind of the on the ground research for that question that Kathleen posed?

Hannah: Yes.

SooJin: Cool. Okay, so I made the commitment from our talk with Crixell Shell to discuss the role of social media with my daughter, and during the last episode, I hadn't done that, but now I have. And so I finally had a conversation with my 13-year-old daughter, Sxela. And I asked her if her friends are on social media, and she said yes, like all of them are on social media. Then I asked her if she knew why her dad and I don't allow her to be on social media. And her answer was "because of the creepy people?." Like, of course, I couldn't help but laugh and I'm like, yes, that's right. But I also added, you know, that it's also because there's a lot of disinformation on social media. And given her age, it's hard to decipher fact, from what are straight out lies. So I asked her if she knew what disinformation was. And her response was, you know, when information is wrong or incorrect, and I'm like, yep, that's definitely part of it. So we talked about the difference between misinformation and disinformation. So misinformation being incorrect information that spread unintentionally, because the person thinks that it's correct. And disinformation as being false information shared with the intent to deceive others, which is very different from misinformation. So disinformation is the spreading of lies on purpose as a strategy to deceive or incite fear and to promote the agenda of the person behind the disinformation. And I asked her if she could think of an example of disinformation. And she immediately named how Trump is telling people that he won the election. So you know, that told me that she understands the difference between misinformation and disinformation. So I think we're all good there, at least for now. And I asked her if she was okay not being on social media when all her friends are and she said she was fine with it. And when I followed up and asked her like, why she was fine with it, she answered, because I don't need it. So I left the conversation feeling very blessed that I have such an easygoing kiddo who understands, you know, like, the reasons why and also agrees with our rationale. I realized that this will be one of several conversations we'll have on the topic as she gets older, but I'm relieved to know that she understands and agrees with the reasons why we're keeping her off social media for now. So with that, Hannah, can you set the intention for our episode today?

Hannah: Yes, and I'm so glad you shared that because I feel like as I pre-plan for these conversations with my kids who are five and seven, it's just so great to have models that I can look to, to start formulating how that will happen. And, and who knows, like how technology will continue to evolve, as we go along. So our intention today is around acknowledging our history. Our previous guest, Kathleen spoke about how our country's story is a crime story. And today, we will go deeper into our country's

history, how our country's history manifests today, especially as it relates to our criminal justice system. So I am very excited to introduce our guest, Mary Moriarty, who currently serves in the role of Chief Public Defender in Hennepin County. And Hennepin County is where Soolin and I both live. Mary is the first woman, Chief Public Defender. And I came to know you, Mary, through one of the workshops that you put on at an assisted living residence a couple of years ago. And during that session, you had shared with our group that you had made a personal commitment, I think it was maybe a new year's resolution or something along those lines, to normalize talking about race within your spheres of influence. And I left that workshop and made the same exact commitment. And that experience has been transformative. And as I mentioned earlier, it has changed my life. So thank you, I will hand it over, please introduce a little bit more about you, who you are, where you're from, and what you do in your own words.

Mary: Thank you. And thank you for inviting me to be here. And I'm really honored to be here and to hear about your work. It's really exciting to me. And I think what's helpful, I was born in Minnesota, I was born in New Ulm, which at one point I looked up the census data on, and I think it was about 98.7% of the people there identified as white. And, and I know that many people in Minnesota grew up in Greater Minnesota in areas where we really didn't have any interaction with people of color. And I think that that's created great issues for us. But I went to college at Macalester went to the University of Minnesota Law School, and then I've spent my entire 31 year career at the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office. I have been extremely fortunate I started doing training probably about 15 years ago all around the country, for public defenders. And I have been fortunate to meet public defenders and non-public defenders from all over the country, and have had my life enriched by many Black men and women who are my friends who have been gracious enough to instruct me, correct me, help me understand what they face. And I think that that is part of what led to my – and it was a new year's resolution by the way. Another part of it was that one of our lawyers, who was called for jury duty was asked by a judge how many of you know judges and he raised his hand. And the judge asked him, how do you know judges and he didn't want to say, oh, I'm a public defender, because he didn't want to get kicked off the jury panel. Right? So he said, well, I don't know them very well, I just know them from around – which of course, could lead you to think of a number of reasons why you would know judges, but the judge said, out loud to everybody, then you must have a record. And I heard that later. And I called this lawyer and I said, how are you? And he said, well, I'm okay now. It was kind of surreal. But he also said, it's just another day in the life of a person of color in Hennepin County. And I, I am aware also, and I've said this in various presentations, that the most difficult place to talk about race, in my experience is not Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, it's actually for me been in Minneapolis and Seattle. Because those are places where we perceive ourselves to be very progressive, and in some ways we are. But we also take great offense and get defensive when people raise issues of race. And so that was part of my new year's resolution of you know what, I need to start talking about race, I need to start

normalizing conversations about race with people I know. And I'm proud to say that that is the one new year's resolution in my entire life that I've kept.

Hannah: Yes, I would agree, I feel like I'm on that same track. Let's talk about how you activate antiracism in your everyday life. The audience of our podcast is mostly parents, caretakers, educators, people who are, you know, raising children in some regard or have some relationship with children. So tell us more about how that enters into your world.

Mary: Mm hmm. I would say I've, I'm an avid reader, I have spent a lot of time educating myself. I think that one thing that we and when I say we, I mean white people tend to do is to ask Black and Brown people to educate us about how to be antiracist, and it's not their job. As I said, I've certainly had many friends who are gracious enough to talk to me about it, which is great, but it is our job to educate ourselves. And there are plenty of resources out there. Since we're talking about how to be an antiracist, you probably talked about the book, *How to be Antiracist* by Professor Kendi, who also wrote a fantastic book called *Stamped from the Beginning*. And so I would say, first educating ourselves so that we aren't asking questions that we could easily get the answer to. I also talk a lot to my friends, and in Black and Brown friends, parents, about the experiences that they have with their children. And one very easy thing to do, which I never would have thought of, is one of my friends has two young Black children. And she told me that people rarely smile at Black boys. And she's talked to me about her concerns, as all of my friends have about being parents of Black boys in particular, because research tells us they're perceived as being more aggressive and more dangerous by white people. But that was something I could take into my daily life. So now every time I encounter a Black boy, I am intentional about turning to him and smiling. And so that is one of the things I've done. I have also, I came to realize that if you hear something that is inappropriate or racist comment, however unintentional. If you say nothing, you are actually complicit in that comment. And I'll give you an example of something that happened about a year and a half ago. There was a bail symposium, and it was put on by the Minneapolis Foundation. And it was attended by over 100 people, many people of color were there. And there was a prosecutor on the panel, a white prosecutor who kept referring to our clients, public defender clients as being "thugs." And he said that over and over and over, and you could hear the murmurs in the audience. People starting to look around, there were people at my table, friends of mine, you know, looking around, like is somebody going to say something about this? In fact, one of my friends who was sitting at the table, a Black woman turned to me, she used the phrase that I think many people some people might not understand, but she said, "Do you got your people?" Are you going to go get your people meaning you're white, deal with it. Because Black and Brown people are exhausted having to deal with this. And it's not particularly their job. And it comes at great cost, which has, I didn't realize at the time, but I now understand how a great the cost. And I said to her yep, yep, I got it. And at the end of the panel, they had a Q&A. And I asked for a microphone. And as politely as I could, I mean I knew this prosecutor and I knew he probably wouldn't take it very

well, but as politely as I could I said, I am asking you to check your language, because “thug” is really highly racially charged. And he just lost it and started screaming even worse things into a microphone. It was so bad that the organizer of the event had to grab a microphone and go up and ask him to take a timeout. And that was kind of the end of the panel. And then there was a break, and I was out in the hallway. And that same prosecutor came up to me from behind and started screaming at me, he was inches from my face. And he was saying you didn't have to do me like that. And I said, yes, I did have to say something. And then he was screaming, then you and I can't work together again. And I was pretty shaken up by that. But the people at the Minneapolis Foundation came and actually took him away, and said, you have to get yourself together or, you know, you're going to have to leave. Well, that was used in a was an allegation against me. I mean, ultimately, your readers may or may not know, I've lost my job. I am not going to be Chief Public Defender anymore. But that was one of the issues that was raised in my performance that I allegedly called a justice partner, a racist in public. Which I didn't, actually. But it was an eye opening experience, because for years and years and years, I had heard my friends of color, talk about you know what do we do about these microaggressions? Or what they would say is, I am the victim of microaggression, like many, many every day, and it's exhausting trying to decide what to respond to. And I always have to make a calculation about what would happen if I do. And for me, as a white woman, when I thought about, should I say something at that forum? I never once thought that might cost me my job ever, never crossed my mind, I knew was going to be unpleasant because I knew this particular prosecutor. But I never once thought it would cost me my job. And it certainly was used against me, to prevent me from being reappointed. So that was eye opening. I, so we have to, if somebody said to me, well, why didn't you just take that prosecutor aside during a break or some other time and say, hey, that language is charged. And I said, I will no longer do that. He knew better actually, the first words out of his mouth, I have to say when I said that was he said, that's what some people say, when I said it was racially charged, so he knew better anyway. And I can no longer be in an audience of people of color, and hear a white person say something like that, and not say something myself. And that is the difference between being antiracist and kind of neutral. And what Dr. Kendi has said, is you know, sitting there, saying nothing, you are not being antiracist, you are, in effect, being complicit with what's being said. And so to me, that's an example of being antiracist. But here in Minnesota, I think, I know, we don't do well talking about race, we get very defensive, we talk about our intentions instead of the impact. So you also have to be prepared for the consequences of, of trying to raise these issues. But I think it's a great, wonderful idea to be raising kids to be aware of these issues. And to say something in their peer group when we're not there. You know, parents aren't there, so that they can get used to saying things when they recognize them. That are going to be I think, so much supportive and helpful to young children of color or children of color who are growing up and hearing these things every day.

SooJin: You know, thanks so much for sharing that example. Very powerful. And I'm sorry that you lost your job because of it. But I think you know what, you know, Kendi, he says that there is no neutrality,

you know, in this system of racism, you're either racist or antiracist, there is no neutral zone. Right? So given that I was, you know, you had said that you would have never known that you interrupting this microaggression would have cost you your job. And in hindsight, would you have made a different choice if you knew the risk?

Mary: I think that's a great question. And I have to point out too, the reason I never thought anything more of it is my white privilege, right? I mean, this has been a really eye opening experience for me. I wouldn't have thought about it this way at the time, but I sort of I'm, I kind of assumed, and I didn't consciously think about this, but I certainly when I'm thinking what are the consequences of it, I have white privilege. And I suppose in that mix, it just never occurred to me as a white woman saying something like this, that I could, it could be used against me in an investigation and be part of why I lost my job. And so that's really important, I think, for all of us to think about that, you know, people talk about what can you do? And how do you be antiracist, and a lot of that is using our white privilege. And we do need to do that. But it's also a white privilege to be able to do that without the same consequences that our Black friends have. The answer to your question. Yeah, I have grown up, my parents raised me to speak up and do the right thing, say the right thing. I think the answer to your question is yes, I would have said something. But I will say it took some education on my part, some thinking about what do I do? Because years ago, I would not have done that not because I didn't want to help. It would probably be because I didn't know what to do. You know, should I have taken him aside? And that really comes from educating at myself. And being in situations where I think we all have been, I can give you one example. I was with friends teaching at a public defender event in Atlanta, I think it was, and we were in a big, we were having dinner, there was a big group of us. And it was a Mexican place with a huge, it was like a dining hall, it was very loud. And there was a woman across from me, friend of mine, a Black woman. We were having a good time. And she was looking over my shoulder a couple of times. And she said there was a white man, a couple at the next table that kept looking at her and glaring at her. And because she was representing like, I can't remember the group we were teaching with, but she said had it been on her own, she would have said something to this guy. Because he kept making comments. And at one point, she did say – sir, do you have an issue? And I turned around. And the guy said, yeah, when are you going to leave? It was something like, you're really loud, and you're bothering me. And I remember thinking at that very time. And I'm pretty sure everybody listening has had an experience like this. It was like, would he have said that to a white person? Did he say that because she was Black? And so I'm sitting there like, looking back and forth. And my friend also can take care of herself. And so I'm thinking, well, I don't want to say something because it feels like, you know, she's going to think I need to protect her. And so all these things went through my head. And by the time I landed on any decision, the guy the couple had left. And so my guess is we've all been in that scenario where we've heard something and we're just kind of like, is that really what I think it is? And so I think the important thing there was for me to think about and think through yeah, that was what I thought it was. And I would not be standing up and I think this

is what where we have to go too. I've reached the point where I don't stand up and say things to protect my friends of color. I stand up and say things for myself, because I want to live in a community where were my friends where you know, where I don't hear that kind of thing where my friends of color don't have to listen to microaggression. That's the kind of community I want to live in. And so I think that's really important for us. Because if we're in that, well, I don't want to be patronizing and look like I'm defending, like, my friend of color can take care of herself. So having been through a couple of those experiences, and reading and educating myself got me to the point where when I was at that bail forum, yes, if I had it to do over again, I would do exactly the same thing. But I will acknowledge if it had been years ago, I might not have had the tools and the understanding. And, you know, for instance, like, when this guy was saying something to my friend, what if I ran outside and said, hey, can I talk to you? Um, this isn't okay. Instead of saying something quietly, I didn't have to make a big scene, but to say something directly to him in that restaurant, which was in front of all my friends in front of him. I think for a while, I didn't realize that saying something, as an aside was complicity in what was being said instead of saying something at the time. In Minnesota too I think things would say, wow, you know, the Minnesota nice thing would not to be confront somebody in the moment. But I have learned when you do that you are being complicit in the moment. So the that was a very long answer to your question, which is yes, I would do the same thing again. But years ago, I would not have had the tools and understanding to know that I should have done that thing.

SooJin: Yeah, I love the distinction that you made of standing up as an action to “protect Black and Brown people” versus standing up because I don't want to live in a world, I don't want to live in an environment where these things happen, because, you know, it's harmful to me as a human being. Right? Yeah. Yeah. And that's that that's the thread that connects all of us together as human beings. Racism hurts all of us. Yeah, I was curious, you know, how, what, what made you commit to this journey, Mary? Was there a particular moment, event that made you say, like okay, I need to commit to being an antiracist? Or was it kind of a series of things or kind of a gradual evolution? Just curious how you came to, to committing to this path.

Mary: I would say there was one moment, although it is also a gradual evolution. But one moment that I'll never forget. I taught for 15 years with a group called Gideon's promise, which is out of Atlanta. And we train public defenders. Mostly to be public defenders in the south, but we've expanded all around the country.

SooJin: That's a documentary film, right? Gideon's Promise.

Mary: Gideon's Army. Yeah.

SooJin: Yeah, that was so powerful. So you're part of that?

Mary: Yeah, I was one of the original faculty core faculty members.

SooJin: Wow, that that documentary film is so powerful.

Mary: All of my footage, by the way, got on the cutting room floor. So I'm not actually in the film itself. But yes, that film does a really wonderful job showing the decisions that people have to make in the criminal legal system. But our group of some Gideon's Promise core faculty members were in Baltimore, to do some training for the Maryland public defenders when Freddie Gray happened. And I have known those particular trainers for years. I know their kids. I've seen their kids grow up. And come to think of like being an aunt to some of those kids. I just love them. So the Freddie Gray uprising happened while we were doing the training there and we had to be evacuated from downtown Baltimore because it was big uprising. And I remember one night we were in a van. And we were looking for someplace to eat outside where it was in the suburbs somewhere. And I remember it was dark, and I remember my friends, some friends of color, but also some friends, white friends who had Black kids who were talking about how they no longer knew what to tell their children about how to come home alive. And they were in tears. And I was just sitting in the back of the van in tears myself, I mean, I had nothing to offer that conversation, but just to listen to their pain. And to really think about how much I love their children and to think about how, as parents, they no longer knew what to tell their children, about how to interact with police that would guarantee that they would come home alive. And that was, as I said, a moment I'll never forget. And so I think that was definitely a moment where I felt I have to step up here. But there were also other moments you know, being a public defender, and seeing what happens, and I mean, and just here in Minnesota seeing what happened to Philando Castile. And it's interesting for me, it also coincided with having an acute understanding of how difficulty we have in Minnesota dealing with race. Racism is something that happens in Louisiana, and Alabama, and wherever in the south. It's not something that we tend to think of happens here. But we don't also think about the mass hanging of Native Americans, which was ordered by President Lincoln in Mankato. We don't think about the lynching of the three young men in Duluth. We don't think about we're all on Native land, Indigenous land. I mean we don't think about sending Native children to boarding schools and stripping away their culture. I mean, we just don't, we don't want to think about that. And we can't in Minnesota, have a conversation, have reconciliation have real solutions to this until we own what we've done. And it's not, you know, and I know people say, well, I didn't have a slave or I wasn't here, when whatever. And that's true. And no friend of color I've ever had wanted me to feel guilty about what's happened in the past. But what they want you to understand is that I have been raised in a culture of white supremacy, I have benefited from white supremacy. And that is true, that is true. And I will say, I mean, my mom was a single mom, I was raised by a single mom for a while we lived in a trailer park up north. And, and so we were poor, for a while until she married a lawyer. And then we weren't, there are different kinds of privilege. But I always have white privilege that won't go away. And I have to recognize that there have been benefits to my

white skin to my family's white skin. For instance, my father was actually a world war two veteran who participated in the D Day landing, he took advantage of the GI Bill and got an education. And we know if you read history, which is why it's really important. We know that Black GI's did not get those same advantages from our government. They didn't get housing, they were redlined. And so they didn't get to build the wealth that my father did. And other people did, either. And so in those ways, you know, no we didn't own enslaved people. We weren't there when the people were lynched in Duluth. Although I will ask people, you know, people need to think about, um, I was reading Caste by Isabel Wilkerson, fantastic book. And she was talking about the mass or the lynchings and the postcards that were made from the lynchings and these pictures. I mean, who were those people who stood, thousands of people who stood by while people were lynched and tortured? Can anybody truly say that they wouldn't have been one of those people that they would have stood up and stopped it? So we have a long ways to go to understand the role of white supremacy, and our country and states terrible treatment of Indigenous people and Black and Brown men and women. And we get stuck at our intentions. Like we're nice Minnesotans, and we didn't mean it. And you'll hear that all the time. Somebody say, well, I didn't mean that. Why are you saying I'm racist? That kind of thing and it doesn't really matter. It's the impact And so I feel as a Minnesotan, that one of my callings, if you want to do it that way is, is to really try to push these conversations here, because it's so needed here. I mean, I could go teach in Alabama or you know, wherever, but I'm a Minnesotan. And I want to improve conditions from Minnesota here. I want, you know, when, when Minneapolis or Minnesota lands on the top cities or states to live in, it's always for white people. I want that for my Black and Brown friends as well. And we have a long way to go there. But that's the work we need to do here.

Hannah: I have a question about. So like the idea of normalizing conversations about race. And in particular, this is something that I focus on, with like white family members, white neighbors. And so I'm wondering kind of what your experience is, in talking specifically with the white people in these networks of influence and kind of where have you found pushback? Or what, you know, what kind of what have you learned in your journey around those conversations?

Mary: Yeah, it's all over the place. You know, I can give you an example. When I give presentations at churches a lot. And wherever anybody invites me to come and talk about the system, I'm happy to come and speak. But there are often people in those spaces who will say that they feel that as white people they're discriminated against. And there's only so much you can do in a presentation in those spaces. But I think taking aside your friends, I certainly have told I've been much more bold about telling friends kindly about, hey, I heard you just say this. And I don't know if you know the origin of that, but it came from here. And, and I usually try to preface that depending on who it is with, oh, you know, I was having a text conversation with a friend of mine. And I texted something. And my friend was kind enough to point out to me that that was not a good term to use. And I was like, oh my God, no, it wasn't. So I do that. I try to use myself as an example of how I say those things. And I appreciate

it when my friends point out what the issue is. And so I tried to do that with my friends. But here was something interesting that also actually came up in my job here. So one Saturday, I went to a memorial service for a friend of mine's father. The memorial was held in Inver Grove Heights. And on my way home, there was a McDonald's nearby, and I stopped to get a Diet Coke, which I'm kind of addicted to. And I was waiting in line. And I walked in the door and clearly there was something happening. The employees at McDonald's were across the counter and were yelling at a group of Black boys and young men. And I stood there and I was kind of looking back and forth. And there was a definite edge to it. And I quickly ascertained that one of the employees was accusing one of the boys of having not purchased a cup, but used somebody else's cup to fill a soda because they have free soda. But they had claimed or threatening to call the police. And I sat down to have my Diet Coke and was just kind of watching this scenario. And these boys were really well behaved. I think there were about seven or eight of them or something like that. And it was after, I don't know, they just showed up. They were just having a good time and they weren't loud at all. And the police showed up. And the police came in and approached them and said they had to leave. And so I got up and I was just trying to stand a respectful distance away from the officer because I didn't want to create an issue but at some point, I said, so I you know, they weren't doing anything. And one of the police officers was like, sit down or we'll arrest you. Which he you know, saying it to, which I did ultimately complain to the Inver Grove police department because to me that meant nothing like right, what are you going to arrest me for? But to a person who doesn't work in a system that's a threat, and may very well have made the person sit down. And I said, look, I'm just going to tell you, I'm a public defender I, you know, I can watch. I'm a respectful distance away. And I'm telling you, these boys didn't do anything, what did they do? And so they said, well, they're saying that they didn't pay for the drink or something like that, and another man came up. And we both said, hey, how about we pay for the drink, and we went up to the counter, we both offered to pay and McDonald's wouldn't accept that. And ultimately, the boys were kicked out. I had a conversation with the second cop there who was much more pleasant. And I said, you know, you guys, I think you could handle this in a different way. You don't have to be the instrument of people who were clearly I don't know what their issue was with these boys, but calling the police over a cup of pop. Yeah, it was ridiculous. So I was tweeting about it, because I wanted people to know about it. And when City Pages was still alive, they contacted me, and they ended up doing an article about it. And I remember hearing feedback from people I knew some of which one of which was a former cop, a woman who works for the county now, who said to me, why did you have to get involved in that? Why couldn't you just wait until they had kicked the boys out, and then just said something to cop? And I said, because then the boys would not have known that anybody was there speaking out on their behalf. And I think that was a big deal. And she would just not accept that. And it turned out, that was another thing that was used against me in my job thing that I had spoken to the newspaper, the City Pages about this. But one interesting thing was, and I can't remember, so the, one of the mothers of those boys reached out to me on Facebook or messenger or something like that. And she talked to me about how much it meant to her son, and the other boys that somebody stood up and said, hey,

this doesn't seem right. And so once again, that was I think, being antiracist, and not just sitting there watching and maybe reporting it later. But it did, there were a number of people who were really unhappy about it. It's like, what do you expect the cops to do? Well, I expect the cops not to be instruments of private business that just go in and, you know, but that was fairly controversial, even to a woman that I had considered a friend of mine. And so it's all over the place it and in another way you talk about so I'm, let me give you an example of I'm on a committee where we talk about the population of the jail downtown. And when COVID hit, we were at a population of about 800. And the functional capacity is about 755. And then because of many different efforts, it was between four and 500. And, and the county talks a lot about racial disparity reduction, right. And I remember saying to the person who's in charge of public safety of the county, you know, we really aren't addressing racial disparities, which are really, really high at the jail. And he said, well, but we're reducing the overall jail population, which means there are fewer Black people in the jail. And I said, that's not disparity reduction. In fact, we learned that the disparities went slightly up. And so there's such a reluctance to talk about race and racism in these systems where we have systemic racism. And so I would say the answer to your question is I've had success with individuals, with systems not so much. I mean, and here's a good example, after George Floyd, I was optimistic that we could have some of these hard conversations. But all I heard at the county was, boy, the Minneapolis Police Department makes us look really bad. Well, yes, the Minneapolis Police Department has problems and they are under scrutiny. What about the rest of us? What about prosecutors? What about judges? What about probation officers? What about the county? And we're not having those conversations, which I think is really tragic, actually. So as systems – not working so well. I guess, as individuals, and maybe that's the best that we can do is really to make sure that we as individuals are speaking up, and then talking to other people who will then go out and speak up. But that's kind of been my experience.

Hannah: Thank you. Very complex. And I, well, I'm hopeful in the fact of having those individual connections and making progress there. And, yeah, our systems.

SooJin: Yeah, but you know individuals make up a system. In your story, Mary, one of the things that kept kind of going in my mind was this idea of how the system is built, you know, to do exactly this, you know, to strike down people, regardless of their skin color, if they are going against the system against the system of racism. Like, it doesn't matter if you're white or Black, it's going to strike you down. And because it will work to protect itself. And you have individuals who are complicit with the system and want to protect the system, and therefore, you know, the system continues on. So, so for me, it's always kind of this complicated balance of, yes, there's individual work, but individuals also make up the system. And so how do we get more individuals to fight against the system where you're not the anomaly? But actually, you're the status quo, you know, the work that you're trying to do in the county?

Mary: Well, one good thing is there are a lot more people of color who are running for office and winning. That's huge. Yeah. And so the more people of color we can get in the legislature and City Council's on county boards, you know, that have lived experience that's going to change the status quo.

SooJin: Yeah.

Hannah: Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we haven't asked?

Mary: I think so in talking to my friends who have Black kids, they live in constant fear about their children being perceived by white parents, as doing something aggressive. I remember a story that a friend of mine told me about her grandson. He was actually like 16, they were standing in the airport in Atlanta waiting for bags. And this white woman was standing right next to the bag thing. She had one of her bags, and it fell over. And my friend's grandson bent over to pick it up and was about to touch it. And his father grabbed him and pulled him back. And he said, what are you doing? You know, the grandson said, what are you doing anyway? And the father explained to him, you don't know how that white woman will react if she turns around, and she sees your hands on her bag. And so here's a kid who clearly internalized you know, being helpful and wanted to help having to be told by his father, hey, don't do that. You have to think about how white people are going to react to the things that you do. And that's really painful. And so I think that white parents, white people really have to think about try to put themselves as much as they think about how they are perceiving what Black children are doing, or Black people in general are doing. Are their unconscious biases that are jumping into our heads that we need to interrupt? Or are we making the same assumptions that we would about a white child? And that's, it's so painful, like I went with a friend of mine to a park, we were just sitting on a bench this summer, watching her two kids play, and she was watching them like a hawk. And making sure you know, how do they interact with the white kids? And was there any problem? And she told me this story about how her son who's about six, I think, or seven was playing with a white girl and the white girl at daycare or something and the white girl took his toy and he was very upset and he wanted it back. And she said just let it go. Just let it go. Don't worry about it. And her son said why it wasn't fair. She took my toy. If I took somebody's toy you would be telling me to give it back and go apologize. And now you're telling me to let it go. And my friend said she felt awful. Absolutely awful. He was right. But she was doing that because she was afraid that somebody would assume that he had been aggressive with the white girl, and she was trying to protect him. And that's just heartbreaking. It is absolutely heartbreaking. And so to the extent that parents of white children probably can, you know, try to educate themselves, there's a lot of research about unconscious bias, and what we all tend to think of when we, when we see Black kids. We tend to see Black boys and girls as being older than they are, more aggressive than they are. So what kind of assumptions are we making? How are we treating when our kids play together? Do we have playdates with kids of other races? Because

that's really huge, too. So I would just say, I've heard enough of those stories that just are heartbreaking. And I, you know, my friend said to me, I have to decide, you know, how long do I let his innocence go on until I talk to him about a certain aspect of racism, and what it might mean. And parents of white children don't have to do that. And so I think that that's an important thing for parents to educate themselves about and think about ways that they can try to interrupt.

SooJin: Thank you. So before we move on to our lightning round questions, I was wondering if you had anything you'd like to promote? An organization a project or an issue that you'd like to lift up?

Mary: I would say, right now there are Black-owned businesses in North Minneapolis that are selling crafts and Christmas gifts and that kind of thing. It's, I would just in general, try to support Black-owned businesses, restaurants, because they were hit particularly hard, not only in the uprising, but with COVID. So you can come up with lists of Black-owned businesses, restaurants, that kind of thing, get takeout, whatever, try to support them, and other types of Black-owned businesses to try to keep them afloat during this terrible COVID time.

SooJin: Great, thank you. Okay, so whatever, I'm just going to provide a series of questions, whatever comes to your mind first, so don't have to think too hard about these. So fill in the blank. Antiracist parenting or caretaking is...

Mary: Critical.

SooJin: What's the last thing your nieces or nephews, or the children that are meaningful in your life, did to make you smile?

Mary: My administrative assistant has this nine year old girl who knew I was leaving the office and she wrote me the cutest card. It made me cry.

SooJin: That's sweet. So what are you reading right now?

Mary: *Dying of Whiteness*, which I think it actually was interesting. I just finished *Caste*. And I put something about *Caste* on social media. And then somebody said to me, hey, have you read *Dying of Whiteness*? And I said, no. So I ordered that. I'm about a third of the way through it, I highly recommend it. It talks about actually, it's got a lot of statistics and data about white people. The first part is actually in Missouri and gun, they have very lenient, well, they have no gun laws, essentially. And the fact that suicide rates for white people is extremely high, gun violence. It's written by a doctor. It's got a lot of interesting data, and I am really enjoying it. So I highly recommend.

SooJin: Great, thanks. What are you doing to take care of yourself these days?

Mary: Ah, that's a good question. I've had a really rough year like everybody else. I'm trying to figure out what's next in my life in my career. I actually, I wasn't able to read, sometimes I can't read books when I'm, when things are going. In the last couple of weeks I have been able to read. So reading is really important to me. Trying to exercise, which I've been unsuccessful about, but also reaching out to friends. As I said, I've got, I'm fortunate to have a support system all around the country. And so reaching out to them. I'm a huge fan of Brene Brown, by the way, and I love her work. And I have been trying to connect with friends, the friends are reaching out saying, how are you? And instead of saying, oh, I'm fine. I'm saying, well, it's pretty rough right now. And so that is really, I think, an act of self-care of being able to be vulnerable enough to say, wow, yeah, what's happening to me is, is really pretty awful. And here's what's going on. And just understand that they have my back. They're my friends, and they're there. So that's been really helpful.

SooJin: Yeah. Great. What's one thing that you're committed to doing in your antiracist journey?

Mary: What was interesting, you were talking at the very beginning of the show about your previous speaker, who said something that really stuck with me, which is I can't unsee what I've seen, I can't unlearn what I've learned. And that's very true for me, too. I just when you see these things happen. You just, you can't forget it. And so I know that whatever I end up doing has to be about, has to be about antiracism, and doing what I can in our community here about antiracism and criminal legal system reform. Because that's been my life for a long time. So I hope to continue to be able to do that.

SooJin: Great. This is the last question, what question would you like Antiracist Parenting Podcast to answer in a future episode?

Mary: Yeah. I mean, what makes race so difficult to talk about in Minnesota? I kind of think, but how and maybe investigating how to make race easier to talk about in Minnesota. How do we deal, I'm throwing out a bunch here. How do we deal with these systems that don't want to be exposed? What can we do about that? Those are some that off the top of my head, because you're right. The systems are designed to do what they're doing. And so of course, the people in the systems are invested in making sure that people in the public don't understand how they work. So they can stay the same. And I will say about the criminal legal system, it's very difficult to understand from the outside, it's very inside pool very, very easy to say that we're doing something when we're really not. Or we're doing something that really has no impact. And so I've been thinking about ways and then this is one of the reasons I try to speak a lot about it to try to help people understand what how the system works and what it's doing. Because I have seen the power of community to rise up when they see an issue, and they understand what's going on. They are much more powerful than one person or company to

get the community to say, this is something we know we don't want. We want something different than this.

SooJin: Yeah. Right. So is there anything that you'd like to say or share before we say goodbye?

Mary: You know, one other story popped into my head that I just wanted to share. I had heard from Black women primarily that they often felt invisible, and I believed them. But I never knew what exactly that looked like, like, what, what did that look like? And I learned that in a Walgreens about eight months ago, there was one line at the Walgreens in there waiting in line with a Black woman, a white man and me. And so we're waiting in line and then another cashier comes over, and does this pet peeve of mine, which is I'll help who's next instead of actually looking who's next in the line and saying I can help you. But he said, I'll help who's next. And the white man took a step over and, and then turned around to me who is in line behind him and said, oh, I'm sorry, would you like to go ahead of me? And I said, well, this woman is in front of both of us. And he looked at me like, oh, and then she looked embarrassed, unfortunately. And then he just stopped over there. I said, no, you know, thank you. So then it was the Black woman and me waiting in line. And then another cashier came over right next to us, and looked at me and said, can I help you? And I am like, I mean, I still have no explanation right now. I've seen it. I talked to a friend of mine. I said, okay, I've always heard, it's particularly Black women talk about how they feel invisible. Now, I've actually seen it. What is up with that? I mean, like, is it I mean, I still don't know. But there it is. And so one thing that that I mean, I tried to be much more aware, I don't know if that's something I've ever done. But I'm certainly much more aware of it and acknowledge people when I see them Black men and women and but it was just this really bizarre experience to see happen, and to wonder what's actually going on here? And that poor woman was just I was just embarrassed by the whole thing. And I felt really awful about it. So just throwing that out there as a kind of, like the when my friends said that people don't smile at Black boys. I now make an intentional effort when I see a Black boy to turn and smile. But also to acknowledge, make sure I'm looking around and you know, if I see a Black woman or a Black man too because you know, the number of Black men that have said white women will grab their purses or you know, whatever, when this is awful, too. So being intentional about how I interact with people that I am sending the signal that I am not afraid. I am welcoming, I am friendly, just like I would be to anybody else. Which is a little hard for me because I'm an introvert. And so, it is hard. But I think being intentional about that, and being welcoming and friendly and acknowledging people I think is really important.

SooJin: It's interesting, this happens to me all the time. The getting passed over, looked over as if I don't exist. It happens all the time. And it's the contradiction of being a person of color. In certain ways you're hyper visible, right, in certain situations, you're hyper visible, that's all they see is you right? What the whole, like following people around in a store, right? And then in other cases, when it's like service oriented, you're invisible. So yeah.

Mary: Yeah, I'm sorry about that. I think you asked me like, what, what's the impetus behind this work? It's just like, I hate that. I mean, I feel awful. I mean, it'll. And I think this is what too many people, white people get, white women especially, get caught in like the guilt. And I don't think guilt is constructive. Nobody wants anybody to feel guilty. They want them to do something about it. But when I hear about things like that, it's just my empathy. I just feel bad. And I don't want that to happen to people. And so whatever I can do to minimize that happening to people who live in, in our community, I want to see happen. I don't want people to have to live like that.

SooJin: You know, it has happened to me so often, the way that I deal with it is I'm very assertive. So like, if I would have been in that situation, if that would have been me, I would have corrected them and said, no, I'm next, you know, and told the white man to be like, you're behind me, you know, but I also know that that is a privilege I hold as an Asian American woman, right? Because the stereotype around Asian for Asian Americans is that we're passive, that we're non-threatening. Right? And so if you know as a Black woman, like being assertive, that can be dangerous, right? That in that particular situation like they would have called the cops on her. That could be a potential, you know, consequence of her standing up.

Mary: I can just imagine her being called the angry Black woman.

SooJin: Exactly.

Mary: This isn't about, why do you have to make it about race? Yeah, I could just see that happening. But what was really painful was the look on her face. And she felt really embarrassed and humiliated. But yeah, I'm glad you're able to be assertive.

SooJin: Yeah, but that's because of the stereotypes around Asian Americans, you know? So yeah. And so it's a double edged sword here. Yeah. But well, thank you so much for taking the time today to be with us and sharing your story and being vulnerable. And yeah, lots to chew on.

Mary: Thank you for inviting me. I really enjoyed our conversation.

Hannah: Yeah, thank you so much, it really means a lot to us.

SooJin: Okay, take care.

Mary: Thank you. Bye, take care.

SooJin: I had no idea that was her story. And I loved the specific examples that Mary was able to share and how, you know, allyship looks like, you know. I also loved how she didn't even use the word ally, right? Because it's not about being an ally to someone, it's like this my work. I'm responsible, like, I have agency and power, and I'm responsible for the environment that I create. And so and this is the kind of environment that I want, and therefore, this is why this is why I'm doing what I'm doing.

Hannah: Right. Right. And I would want someone to stand up to me if they notice something that I was doing.

SooJin: Yes.

Hannah: Yeah. I feel very, sort of deep in thought at the moment. I really, like you said, the specific stories and examples. You know, I feel like there's this. I don't know what it is maybe like an unspoken rule of like, bringing your professional life like out into social media. And I feel like she navigates that. And, you know, when I think about disrupting racism, it's like, that's what that can look like, people are like, you kind of broke this code of professionalism in some way that some people might have that frame of thought. And yet, you can't disrupt something if you're just doing the unspoken rules all the time.

SooJin: Yeah, and that professionalism actually becomes a weapon. Right? Of white supremacy.

Hannah: Yes.

SooJin: Yeah. To keep people like, in their lane and to follow these unwritten and to not make, you know, any kind of ripples. And what I would say is, what she said, I thought it was entirely professional.

Hannah: Oh, yeah!

SooJin: Like please be mindful of the language that you're using, because, you know, the word thug is racially coded. And it spurs and reproduces this, the stereotype, you know, about Black and Brown people, like when the word thug is said, you never think about a white person, it's always a person of color. So, stop reproducing, you know, that stereotype by using that language. How is that worthy of getting fired for, right, and that actually says a lot about, like the Hennepin County legal system. Like that you're going to punish a woman for interrupting a microaggression?

Hannah: Well, and such a learning experience for her of, you know, this is what people of color have to constantly think about, of when and if I'm going to respond to microaggressions. Day in and day out.

SooJin: Yes.

Hannah: And like, the stakes are high.

SooJin: Yes. Well, so I guess in terms of the commitment, I would like to make, I really, I think it kind of goes back to what I said earlier about how I loved how she didn't, not once, use the word ally or allyship. I don't think she even sees herself as that, you know, but instead just sees herself as I'm a white woman wanting to make our world like I see, I see and know these things because I am in relationship with people of color. And therefore, I want to make this world a better place, not only for them, but for me, because I don't want to live in a world like this. And so I think the takeaway or the commitment that I'm making here is to start reframing. In my teaching, in my trainings in my workshops, when I talk about this work, not around so much around allyship, but around like, we're all complicit. We're all affected, and therefore we all have a responsibility, regardless of our race or social identity.

Hannah: Well, I think that this conversation is helping me to get further along with my goal of, you know, surveying white people and where there are blockages. But also, I want to look into the Gideon's Promise and check out that documentary.

SooJin: Gideon's Army is so powerful. It is so good. Yeah.

Hannah: So I will commit to that.

SooJin: Awesome. Okay. Well, thank you, everyone for joining us. We hope that this series has been helpful and giving you some tangible, concrete ideas and ways to start interrupting racism in your own spheres of influence.

Hannah: Yes. Thank you. And yeah, it's so important to educate ourselves and learn our history.

Outro (music by Mike Myth Productions):

SooJin: We just want to say thank you for joining us today. You can find more information about us and past episodes on our website antiracistparentingpodcast.com. A big shout out to Mike Myth Productions for the intro and outro music.

Hannah: This work requires us to challenge ourselves and take care of ourselves. Be well.

SooJin: Be antiracist.