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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an analysis of how white women experience racial privilege in the international development arena. Based on post-structuralist ideas of identity construction and subjectivity formation, I examine the narratives of six white middle class female development workers in order to gain a deeper understanding of white privilege. Using grounded theory to examine the data, I find that the development arena offers an occasion for white women to fulfill their socially mandated subject position and therefore reproduce hierarchical relations across race. Furthermore, the data indicates that white female development workers resist engaging in critical self-reflection that would compromise the “helping” and “good” narrative of self as a development worker, which portrays the self in heroic terms. The lack of critical self-reflection suggests that the performance of whiteness and denial of white privilege exists within the everyday lived experience of white female development workers. I argue that this performance of white subjectivity is problematic because it maintains inequality in the development arena by sustaining white dominance and non-white subordination. This pattern must be broken in order to re-establish relationships in the development arena that reflect equality and justice.

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DEDICATION

To white development workers asking tough questions; don't stop, we have a long way to go.

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