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Pre-service teachers' perspectives on race: the impact of key experiences

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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON RACE.

THE IMPACT OF KEY EXPERIENCES

by

Lanese Kwegyir Aggrey

<u>An Abstract</u>

ABSTRACT

This study seeks insight into the experiences of white pre-service teachers concerning issues of race prior to their embarking on a required multicultural education course. The study seeks to explore these questions. What kinds of racial knowledge or familiarity do pre-service teachers bring with them to their undergraduate classrooms? What key events have shaped their attitudes and their ability to talk about race? What concerns do they have about their ability to teach future students who are racially different from themselves?

This study was conducted using qualitative methods, with a series of questions posed to small focus groups in a university in the Midwest. The participants' responses were transcribed and coded for examination. Utilizing this method, several themes emerged.

Participant interviews revealed a complex range of intellectual and emotional responses to questions about their experiences with race. Students reported feeling inadequately prepared to engage in racial dialogue and expressed concern that their lack of knowledge would lead to misunderstandings. While most participants generally reported a strong sense of acceptance of others, they also acknowledged feelings of guilt as they struggled to make sense of their own prejudice and bigotry. Resentful about the social pressures they felt were brought about by a perceived environment of over zealous political correctness, participants also reported feelings of alienation from family and friends they considered racist in their actions and their speech. Fearing that constant attention to race could cause a return to a period of greater racial tension, the participants also spoke of their desire for more opportunities to engage in meaningful racial dialogue

and to learn more about those who were racially different. Overall, participants cited early family interactions and media exposure as key influences that continue to shape their current perspectives on race. While some participants embraced these early experiences, many sought to distance themselves and determine their own path.

Despite these complicated struggles with race and racial dialogue, the participants felt determined and optimistic about their ability to provide leadership for their future students.

Abstract Approved.

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Thesis Supervisor

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Title and Department

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by

Lanese Kwegyir Aggrey

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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Diversity is fine. All those other things are fine,
but what ails us is what we feel about the issue of race ...

Walter Reed,
Waterloo Human Rights Commission

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I love you both – always and forever.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I would tell the story every semester. As an African-American instructor teaching

a multicultural education class, I often used humor in an effort to put my mostly white

students at ease. So I would tell the story of my grandmother who would struggle to

describe a popular television personality without ever directly referring to the woman's

race. Her verbal gymnastics were quite amusing as she described the woman's hair,

approximate height, weight and anything else she could remember. Although I knew

exactly who she was describing, this became a game to me. just how many ways could

she find to avoid telling me the woman was white? Every time my grandmother would

offer another characteristic, I would feign complete and wide-eyed ignorance to the

woman's identity. Finally in frustration, my grandmother began to vigorously rub the

back of her hand with a finger and whisper dramatically. "You know … (long pause) …

She's not … " As my look of confusion grew, I thought she would rub the skin

completely off her hand, the friction grew so intense! I leaned in closer and in my best

stage whisper asked, "What do you mean, Dearie? She's doesn't have skin? She's not

human? What is it??!!" My grandmother - by then completely exasperated with me -

would finally spit out in words reminiscent of her generation, "Colored! She's not

colored!!" Furious at my insolence, she gave me the 'evil eye' and stomped past me out

of the room. I had gone too far! Although I found this whole scenario amusing, my

grandmother most certainly did not. I forced this elderly, educated, southern black

woman to break an unwritten social rule. I made her verbally acknowledge race - out loud

- in polite conversation!

This story always got a laugh from my students. My primary intent in telling the story was to illustrate the level of discomfort people often feel, even a person of color, when engaging in a discussion on race. My secondary intention in using a humorous story was to relieve the tension and set the stage for a classroom topic that is often considered taboo, or at the very least extremely sensitive. the topic of race. Darrell Cleveland, a Professor of Education at New Jersey City University who specializes in teaching pre-service teachers about matters of diversity and social justice, noted the ever-present challenge of how to teach this subject to students. He stressed,

> How one approaches the instructional delivery is critically important in how students receive and retain the information. Moreover, challenging students to think critically, encouraging discourse, and fostering critical reflection will all depend on how the information is presented to students (Cleveland, 2005, p. 62).

His classroom experiences mirror mine and I have always thought deeply about ways to set the stage for the task of teaching about race. I have found that a little humor has gone a long way toward relaxing pre-service teachers who were required to take that particular multicultural education course.

Although my grandmother was several generations older than my students, I have found similar reticence in the pre-service teachers I encountered while teaching that multicultural education class. The course, with a focus on social issues such as discrimination, diversity, equity, racism, sexism, and ethnic and socioeconomic pluralism and their influence on American schools and classrooms, was designed to be a forum where issues of race and other differences could be comfortably explored in a manner and atmosphere conducive to self-reflection and learning. George Howard, founder of the REACH Center for Multicultural Education in Seattle, Washington, and author of <u>We Can't Teach What We Don't Know. White Teachers/Multiracial Schools</u>, reflected on the

importance of this kind of work for educators as they prepare for their diverse

classrooms.

> My work with educators … has convinced me that we have not gone far enough
> in our analysis of the issues nor deep enough in our design of possible
> responses … Too often we (white educators) have seen the problems as 'out
> there' and we have conceptualized our role as one of 'helping minority students.'
> Seldom have we helped white educators look deeply and critically at the
> necessary changes and growth we ourselves must achieve if we are to work
> effectively with the real issues of diversity (Howard, 1999, p. 3).

As an instructor, my hope was that the semester-long course would expand student-

teacher knowledge of self and others as well as instill a sense of purpose and confidence

while they prepared to serve all their future students. But like my grandmother, every

semester I found students, the vast majority of whom were white, going to great lengths

to avoid examining and discussing their views on race, a vital component of a class such

as this.

Multicultural educators have called for pre-service teachers to delve into issues of

diversity and multiculturalism, yet student reactions to the course content and the value of

this material for their future classrooms vary widely. While a few students would engage

in classroom discussions enthusiastically, every semester most seemed reluctant, even

fearful, to participate at all. Geneva Gay, Professor of Multicultural Education at the

University of Washington, Seattle, has seen this behavior with her own pre-service

teachers and noted that student reluctance often turned into "various forms of subtle

resistance." She stressed,

> It is a common occurrence for students in teacher education programs to express
> various forms of subtle resistance to embracing the multicultural imperative for
> quality teaching and learning … This resistance takes many different forms,
> including fear, denial of the verity of ethnic and cultural diversity and …
> reluctance to confront issues of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity directly and
> substantively … They are concerned about inadvertently saying something stupid

or hurtful and embarrassing themselves or offending people from other ethnic groups (Gay, 2000b, p. 2).

Perhaps these fears were understandable many years ago when segregation was the norm and in some cases legally sanctioned. In social settings, contemporary students seem to accept racial relationships readily, at least on the surface. It is now rather commonplace to witness students of all races socializing, studying together and dating. In the milieu of popular culture, differences sometimes appear to be embraced to the point of almost being a non-issue. Why then, did there appear to be such strong aversion to open discussions on race in classes for contemporary pre-service teachers?

Overview

Demographic data confirm that the majority of teachers entering the field will remain primarily young, white and female into the foreseeable future. At the same time, North American K-12 classrooms are becoming more diverse, reflecting the nation's overall demographic landscape (Hodgkinson, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics website. www.nces.ed.gov, NCES, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education estimates that approximately 86% of all current primary and secondary teachers are white and that this demographic makeup will remain relatively stable into the foreseeable future (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1999). At the same time, it is also projected that in the next 20 years, fully 25% or more of the students entering all classrooms will "come from ethnically/racially/culturally and economically diverse groups" (NCES, 2001; Bennett, 1998). In numerous states such as California, Arizona, Texas, Florida and New Mexico, this statement has already become a reality as "the share of the U.S. population that is white is declining (and) minority groups continue to grow … " (Frey, 2006). William Frey, a demographer at the University of Michigan Population Studies Center and author

of <u>America by the Numbers</u>, noted that four states (California, Arizona, Texas and Florida) already have a "majority-minority" population of over 50% (Frey, August, 2005 NPR transcript). These changes already are and will continue to fundamentally re-shape and impact the classrooms that contemporary pre-service teachers will enter.

Thus, those who teach and those who would be taught often come from radically different cultures (Gay, 2000). Once their paths intersect in the classroom, these new teachers "often have difficulty functioning as role models or cultural brokers for (their) students" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 934). Of this divergence, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Professor of Education at Boston College, stated,

> There are marked differences in the biographies and experiences of most teachers who are White European Americans from middle-class backgrounds who speak only English, on the one hand, and many students who are people of color, and/or live in poverty and/or who speak a first language that is not English on the other hand (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 934).

Lisa Delpit, Professor of Urban Educational Leadership at Georgia State University and author of <u>Other People's Children</u>, offered many examples of the disconnect that often happens when teachers have not been trained to bridge the racial and cultural divide between themselves and their students. Delpit recalled one example involving the concept of literacy fluency, an approach to writing required in the Philadelphia school system, among others. This approach stressed that children needed to learn "to be fluent in writing … to be comfortable (just) putting pen to paper, before they could be expected to conform to any conventional standards of writing" (Delpit, 1995, p. 16). Teachers complained that this 'new method' and the white administrators who required its use, failed to recognize that the work black students were already producing *was* in fact, fluent; that they had already become comfortable and prolific with "putting pen to paper."

Delpit noted that one African-American teacher bitterly complained about the

assumptions imbedded in this method, arguing,

> What do they think? Our children have no fluency? If they think that, they ought
> to read some of the rap songs my students write all the time. They may not be
> writing their school assignments but they sure are writing. Our students *are*
> fluent! (Delpit, 1995, p. 16).

This example illustrates the necessity of new teachers acquiring knowledge,

critical-thinking skills and comfort in the area of race. Although race is certainly not the

only area where multicultural training is needed for pre-service teachers, it is one of the

most salient. David and Derald Wing Sue, prominent psychologists and professors

working in the area of cultural counseling (Western Washington University and Teachers

College, Columbia University, respectively), noted the difficulty of living in American

society without being impacted by race and racism in some form or another. They

emphasized,

> Being a white person in this society means the chronic exposure to ethnocentric
> monoculturalism as manifested in white supremacy. It is difficult, if not
> impossible, for anyone not to inherit the racial biases, prejudices, misinformation,
> deficit portrayals, and stereotypes of their forbearers. To believe that we are
> somehow immune from inheriting such aspects of white supremacy is to be
> arrogant, naïve, or self-deceived (Sue & Sue, 1999, p. 145).

Rebecca Powell, Associate Professor of Education at Georgetown College, expanded on

the Sues' notion to express that, "racism goes beyond individual prejudice and acts of

discrimination; it has become a part of the very fabric of our society" (Powell, 2001, p.

22). She argued that this form of ubiquitous racism is the strongest argument in favor of

multicultural education in that "it takes students beyond their limited experiences and

expands their thinking" (Powell, 2001, p. 11).

Although this country's demographic landscape has dramatically shifted, in many ways we remain sheltered and segregated from each other. Without opportunities to become engaged with each other beyond the superficial, an experiential chasm can contribute to and feed the development of stereotypes and prejudice. Beverly Daniel Tatum, Professor of Psychology, president of Spelman College and author of Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria And Other Conversations On Race, wrote,

> Most of the early information we receive about 'others' – people racially, religiously, or socio-economically different from ourselves – does not come as the result of first-hand experience. The second-hand information we do receive has often been distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes and left incomplete … Sometimes the assumptions we make about others comes not from what we have been told, but rather what we have not been told. The distortion of historical information about people of color leads young people (and older people, too) to make assumptions that may go unchallenged for a long time (Tatum, 1997, p. 4-5).

Contributing to the complexity of interracial social relations is a general discomfort and reluctance to openly discuss issues of race, racism or difference. A sensitive topic under the best circumstances, uneasiness with racial dialogue is particularly troubling for teachers as they prepare to lead multiracial and multicultural classrooms. In addition to content knowledge and pedagogical skills, teachers will be called upon to navigate a landscape involving myriad ethnic and racial differences. At some point in their teaching careers, this landscape will likely include participation in discussions on race; perhaps with their students, their parents or their colleagues.

As the field of multicultural education developed during the Civil Rights movement, racial understanding and a reduction of prejudice evolved as a goal for pre-service teachers. In colleges of education, teacher educators encouraged racial discourse

by providing a vehicle for pre-service teachers to begin this process. Curriculum, media resources such as film, television or documentaries have been used to serve as a conduit to initiate and support such discussions. Martha Kransdorf, Professor of Education at the University of Toledo, noted that contemporary pre-service teachers tend to,

> … see issues of diversity and race in school as historical issues that have little if any relevance to their current lives as students or their future lives as teachers. Our challenge, then, is to bring the exploration to a personal level through engaging feelings, empathies, and value systems directly (Kransdorf, et al., 2005, p. 233).

Other educators concur that encouraging pre-service teachers to connect abstract concepts (such as racism or equity) to contemporary and personal issues is the most effective approach for multicultural educators (Walsh, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Landsman, 2001; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999).

As multicultural education continued to develop as a research and practical area, educational researchers and activists stressed the importance of future teachers, not only acquiring knowledge about diverse students, but also acquiring the confidence to discuss and explore issues of race and difference *before* they enter their own classrooms (Boltgatz, 2005; Banks & Banks, 2004; Landsman, 2001; Tatum, 2000, 1997, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1994). For example, Jane Boltgatz, an Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education at Fordham University, emphasized the need for teachers to possess "racial literacy" as one means toward becoming more comfortable with racial discourse. Boltgatz broadly defined racial literacy as developing the ability to view the world with a critical eye about racial issues, as well as institutional and personal racism. She stressed,

> … Racially literate (people) are willing to break the taboos of talking about race. They can hear and appreciate diverse and unfamiliar experiences. They are

genuine about their feelings. They recognize that they have much to learn and they know how to ask questions. Cultivating racial literacy takes courage … (and) we learn to talk about race and racism by *talking* about race and racism (Boltgatz, 2005, p. 1-2).

Boltgatz's activist directive may be simplistic because there appear to be numerous barriers which often prohibit productive and open discussion. Concerns of offending others is one reason cited as a barrier to conversation about race or difference. In a society where concerns about political correctness are pervasive, some would rather not take the risk of having a comment misinterpreted. For others, a lack of knowledge on issues of race adds to the discomfort of racial dialogue. Perhaps the biggest obstacle blocking racial discourse is the paralyzing fear some feel of being labeled a racist. Paul Watchel, author of Race in the Mind of America, noted,

The words 'racism' and 'racist' tend to be conversation stoppers. When 'I disagree' or 'You don't understand' or 'You don't know the facts' or even 'You're wrong' becomes 'You're racist,' real dialogue ceases (Watchel, 1999, p. 27).

The charge of racism can have dire consequences for the accused, regardless of the validity of the allegation. From embarrassment to possible loss of income, position or community perception, for many the fear of being labeled a racist may simply be too great a risk for racial dialogue.

All these barriers blocking open racial discourse contribute to our society's continued struggle with racial issues in the 21st century. Because the nation's schools mirror the larger society, our continued lack of progress in race relations and racial literacy, portends future problems, particularly for Colleges of Education charged with training tomorrow's teachers (Holmes Report, 1995).

Impetus for the Study

While multicultural researchers are expansive on the role multicultural education courses must play in the training of pre-service teachers for diverse classrooms, less comprehensive research is available which focuses on the perspective of pre-service students who are enrolled in those courses to guide policy and practice (Milner, 2003; Texeira & Christian, 2002; Gay, 2000). Rahima Wade, Associate Professor at the University of Iowa, stated that "while various approaches to reducing prejudice in school-age children have been promoted, less has been written about how to address the prejudices held by their future, mostly white teachers" (Wade, 1998, p. 84). Along those lines, some critics have specifically expressed concern over the lack of research on the real-life concerns and needs of higher education students who are about to enroll in multicultural education courses (Milner, 2003; Texeira & Christian, 2002; Gay, 2000). Teacher educators and educational policy makers have tended to make assumptions about the knowledge base and experience of undergraduate students without comprehensive empirical research to guide policy and practice. Student input within the context of assessment is a potentially vital but often overlooked component in determining the efficacy of current multicultural education efforts.

Without their input, researchers miss much needed information so that curriculum, pedagogy and practice remain relevant to students. The continued development of practice without significant input from those affected may be ineffective. For example, multicultural education courses are generally designed based on the assumption that white pre-service teachers begin their training with limited knowledge, interaction or experience with those who are different from themselves. While lack of social experience

or interaction may have certainly been true in the past, current research on 'the Millennial generation," those who are of the 'traditional' college age for current teacher education programs, illustrate that this assumption may no longer be valid (Chideya, 1999). If in fact, students are engaging more in social contact with those different from themselves, does that experience convert into better understanding of others beyond the superficial? Are there adjustments needed in curriculum and pedagogical practices to accommodate for the changing experiences of contemporary pre-service teachers? These questions and others should be considered while developing programs which strive to be pertinent and timely for our future teachers. This research project seeks to contribute to that effort.

Purpose of the Study

Broadly, this project seeks to explore the racial experiences of selected pre-service teachers at a large, Midwestern, Research I university before they have taken the required multicultural education course. More specifically, this study is an effort to seek insight into the experiences, ideas and attitudes of pre-service teachers on the issue of race as well as to explore their ability to discuss these issues.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer these questions.

- **What kinds of racial knowledge and experience do students bring with them to the classroom?**

  Have some pre-service teachers come to the course having had extensive experiences with those who are racially different from themselves? If so, have these experiences helped or hindered their ability to discuss racial issues? What have they learned from these experiences? At the other end of the spectrum, are

there pre-service teachers who have never had any personal contact with someone racially different? How do attitudes on race differ given varying levels of experience? How is race and racism conceptualized by the students?

- **How do white pre-service teachers talk about race?**

  How comfortable are they in discussing race and issues of difference? If they are not comfortable, what barriers inhibit open discussions of these issues?

- **What are their attitudes and concerns about teaching their future students who are racially different from themselves?**

  Are they anxious? Fearful? Confident? Indifferent? Do they believe that 'students are students' and should all be treated the same?

Rationale for the Study

Research in multicultural education has primarily focused on its overall philosophical or theoretical foundations (e.g. Banks & Banks, 2004; Howard, 1999; Chavez & O'Donnell, (eds.), 1998; Artiles & McClafferty, 1998; Cabello & Burnstein, 1995; McCarthy, 1994; Sleeter, 1991); its impetus, history, growth and development as well as projected policies and practice (e.g. see Banks & Banks, 2004, 2003; Cochran-Smith, et al, 2004; Grant, et al, 2004; Causey, et al, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Gay, 2000); or distinctions within multicultural education itself (Banks & Banks, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Tatum, 1994). In an area closely related to this project, studies have been conducted to investigate the overall effects of multicultural education courses on pre-service teachers' awareness, attitudes and beliefs (e.g. see Allen & Porter, 2002; Garmon, 2000; Palmer, 1999; Ponterotto, et al. 1998; Richardson, 1996; Cabello & Burnstein, 1995; Harrington & Hathaway, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Sims, 1981). However,

there is little evidence of research which examines pre-service teachers' experiences and attitudes *before* taking multicultural courses and how (or if) they discuss issues of race.

Limitations of the Study

This study will be limited in scope. While this researcher acknowledges that comprehensive multicultural preparation encompasses numerous areas, (such as class, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.), this study will focus on one aspect of difference, race, within an educational system and a society where many differences exist. The researcher also recognizes that the issue of race does not exist within a vacuum but often intersects with a number of other constructs such as gender, culture, sexual orientation, physical, mental and emotional abilities, age as well as economic and social class (hooks, 1994; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; Lourde, 1984). However, in an effort to give this study a clear focus, race will be the sole focus examined here.

In addition, this study is based on a limited number of research participants as detailed more fully in the Methodology chapter. While invitations were extended to over 100 potential participants, this study was finally conducted with 13 pre-service teachers. While much effort was made to increase this number, the reluctance of volunteers may illustrate the very nature of racial discussions; they can be fraught with discomfort, reluctance, fear and perhaps, disinterest. Those who chose to participate, although apprehensive at the onset, persevered and showed courage in their decision to become part of the study. Their willingness to participate makes them a unique sub-set within their larger population, which limits the generalizability of this studies' findings.

This study is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 will offer the reader a contextual framework for the remainder of the study by providing background information on the genesis of multicultural education, an overview of contemporary pre-service teachers and conflicting influences they may encounter before they take their multicultural education course. Chapter 3 investigates the literature of scholars as they examine the relevance of race in the 21st century. This chapter explore researchers' views on racial dialogue as it pertains to the general public as well as how pre-service teachers may discuss issues of race within their courses. Chapter 4 provides methodological information on the implementation of this study and its predecessors, a pilot study and two in-class interviews. An overview of the participants for this research project is also submitted here. Chapter 5 presents the words of the participants themselves, as they consider their experiences with race, the genesis of their current perspective and their attempts at racial dialogue. Chapter 6 will summarize major findings from this study and will discuss possible implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2
CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

Maureen Wilson, Professor of Higher Education at Bowling Green State University, noted that "Every generation of students brings its own history, strengths and challenges to campus" (Wilson, 2004, p. 69). Her observation is particularly relevant for this study in general and this chapter in particular. While any number of factors may complicate the teacher/student dynamic, this chapter will focus on two significant considerations that are germane to this discussion of contemporary pre-service teachers. 1) the demographic and general culture of pre-service teachers entering today's classrooms and 2) societal messages about race and racial discourse which might prove influential to pre-service teachers as they begin coursework in multicultural education. In addition, a very brief overview on the genesis of and overall goals of multicultural education courses will begin the discussion. Serving as background information for the reader, this summary will contribute to the overall study by providing a contextual framework and by alerting the reader to assumptions inherent in multicultural education courses which may or may not apply to contemporary pre-service teachers. Because this study seeks to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers *prior* to enrolling in a multicultural education course, it is important to know who these students are and what influences and perspectives they may bring with them to their courses.

Multicultural Education – An Overview

The conceptualization and goals of multicultural education are quite diverse as defined by multicultural educators who specialize in the topic (Duarte & Smith, 2000, p. 2). Dr. James Banks, Professor and Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington-Seattle and his wife, Dr. Cherry Banks, Professor of

Education at the University of Washington-Bothell, are two of the most prolific researchers on multicultural education. Their work is widely used in courses for pre-service teachers. The Banks' have broadly defined multicultural education as,

> … at least three things. an idea or concept, an educational reform movement and a process. Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students-regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics-should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks, 2003, p. 3).

They assert that within their broad definition, multicultural education must also incorporate five goals as part of the philosophy and practice. 1) Content integration; 2) the knowledge construction process; 3) prejudice reduction; 4) an equity pedagogy; and 5) an empowering school structure (Banks, 2003, p. 20). Joel Spring, Professor of Education at the New School University, also envisioned a set of goals one should strive for within multicultural education.

> The first goal (of multicultural education) is to build tolerance of other cultures. The second goal is to eliminate racism. The third goal is to teach the content of different cultures. And the fourth goal is to teach students to view the world from differing cultural frames of reference (Spring, 2000, p. 166).

Other educators stressed a more political view of multicultural education as essential to our society's survival and continued growth as a democratic nation (e.g. Bennett, 1999; Sleeter and Grant, 1999; Chavez, 1998). For example, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, asserts that multicultural education is "a philosophy that embodies concepts of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity (as) contained in the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence" (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 171). Along those same lines, Christine Bennett, Professor of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington, imagined multicultural education as

> … an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs, and affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world. It is based on the assumption that the primary goal of public education is to foster the intellectual, social and personal development of virtually *all* students to their highest potential (Bennett, 1999, p. 11).

In addition to democratic ideals, Dr. Bennett imagined multicultural education as encompassing globalism, with benefits not limited by national boundaries. Citing "an increasing inter-connectedness among all nations," Dr. Bennett stressed the necessity of expanding the vision of multicultural education as we move forward into the 21st century to include nations and communities around the world (Bennett, 1998, p. 11).

Some multicultural educators have stressed the need for multicultural education theory to serve as a natural platform for social action. In that vein, Sonia Nieto, Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, stated, "Because (multicultural education) focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, it promotes the democratic principles of social justice" (Nieto, 1996, p. 307). Nieto's views were pre-dated by the likes of Paulo Freire (1970) and echoed by contemporary educators such as Landsman (2006), Ladson-Billings (2001), Chavez (1998) and hooks (1994).

Finally, it is important to note that a number of educators stress multicultural education's role in the reduction of racism and prejudice, with Nieto arguing that "antiracism…is at the very core" of multicultural education (Nieto, 1998; Banks, 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 2004; Spring, 2000; Grant & Sleeter, 1999; Cushner, 1996). Anti-racism and healthier inter-racial interactions has also been a central theme in the research conducted by the Banks' as well. They stressed,

> An important goal of multicultural education is to improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate

> in cross-cultural interactions … Multicultural education is consequently as important for middle-class White suburban students as it is for students of color who live in the inner city (Banks in Howard, 1999, p. ix-x.)

Although contemporary researchers have numerous ideas of what multicultural education is and how it should be conducted, this divergence of vision, goals and practices is not without historical precedence.

The Birth and Growth of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education grew from the African-American struggle for overall civil rights and "developed as a response to inequality in education based on racism, ethnocentrism and language discrimination" (Nieto, 1998, p. 6). During the 1960's, African-Americans in the civil rights movement were "taking to the streets and to the ballot box" to demand equal opportunities in virtually every aspect of American life, including American institutions (Banks, 1995, p. xi). Education was a key area where fundamental changes were demanded and "beginning in the late sixties and continuing through the seventies and eighties, leaders lobbied for the rights of underserved groups" (Garcia and Pugh, 1992, p. 215). Challenges were made to all levels of educational institutions for an increase in hiring a more diverse faculty and for changes in courses and curriculum more reflective of the diversity of American culture. One response by administrators was to develop 'ethnic studies' courses; generally classes in African and African-American history and culture, accompanied by a rapid rise in the hiring of African-American educators. This triumph had a snowball effect on other marginalized groups and inspired others to push for changes to address their needs as well. Banks noted,

> The visible success of the civil rights movement, plus growing rage and a liberal national atmosphere, stimulated other marginalized groups to take actions to

eliminate discrimination against them and to demand that the educational system respond to their needs, aspirations, cultures and histories ... Multicultural education emerged from the diverse courses, programs, and practices that educational institutions devised to respond to the demands, needs and aspirations of the various groups (Banks, 2003, p. 5,6).

Courses and entire programs, such as African-American Studies and Women's Studies, were developed at this time to address student demands. Some campuses created 'culture houses' as places where under-represented students could socialize, host events and bond in an environment where they would not feel marginalized.

These early efforts were rather haphazard and often did not systemically address the needs of students. Schools, sometimes within the same university, would often have very different approaches to address issues as educators sought ways to "become multicultural" (Ford, 1999, p. 4). So varied was the conception and practice of multicultural education that Banks describes its early incarnation as "a variety of programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language, minorities, low-income groups and people with disabilities" (Banks, 1997, p. 6).

After the initial push in the 1960's, policy-makers and administrators continued in their efforts to address the needs of the growing diversity in the nation's schools, with a marked increase in research and practice in the mid-1990's. Carl Grant, Professor of Education and African-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, theorized that the growing attention was due to.

… an increase in the population of people of color; the development of a climate that encouraged, although reluctantly, increased respect for group empowerment; the acceptance of the importance of social and cultural factors in learning and the movement toward challenging traditional assumptions and envisioning multiple possibilities for change (Grant, 1999, p. 1).

Even with additional efforts to change, "most teachers and prospective teachers had little

personal experience or professional training in cross cultural issues" (Nieto, 1998, p. 17).

As the country's classrooms continued to diversify, many educators maintained that

teachers needed preparation to become knowledgeable and comfortable in classrooms

with students who often did not resemble themselves (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-

Billings, 2000). In fact, preparation for multicultural classrooms would need to entail

comprehensive change for pre-service teachers to become prepared and effective.

Professors of Education at Montclair State University, Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara

Lucas, agreed with this assessment and stated.

> Because many teachers-to-be enter teacher education believing that schools are
> impartial institutions, that cultural diversity is problematic, that knowledge is
> objective and neutral, that learning consists of passively absorbing new
> information and repeating it by rote, and that teaching entails dispensing
> information, preparing them to be culturally responsive (to diverse students)
> requires a complete re-socialization (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, p. xix).

In 1976, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE),

determined that multicultural education should become a mandatory part of teacher

education programs, "requiring that institutions seeking accreditation show evidence that

multicultural education was planned for (by 1979) and then provided (by 1981) in all

programs of teacher preparation" (Cochran-Smith, et al, 2004, p. 936). In addition,

several states also mandated that pre-service teachers take a multicultural education

course as part of their certification requirements (Gollnick, 1995). Donna Gollnick,

current Senior Vice President of NCATE noted,

> By 1993, 16 of the 17 national curriculum guidelines approved by the NCATE
> had incorporated multicultural guidelines … 35 states referred to ethnicity and/or
> the importance of understanding cultural influences on learning and schooling in
> their policies regarding teacher candidates; 40 states required that schools or

teacher education programs include the study of ethnic groups, cultural diversity, human relations, or multicultural and bilingual education (Gollnick, 1995).

By 2002, the Association of American Colleges and Universities reported results from a national survey that revealed "63% of colleges and universities report that they either have in place a diversity requirement or they are in the process of developing one" (Diversity Digest, 2002). Within Colleges of Education, most teacher preparation programs have added courses that directly examine issues of multicultural education in an effort to prepare pre-service teachers for the demographic realities of today's schools. (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 932; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996).

Since the mid-1990's, multicultural education has continued to grow to include research on practice as well as theory. Academics such as Banks and Banks (1993 – 2007), Geneva Gay (1993, 1995, 1997), Joyce King, (1991, 1997), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 1999-2001), Sonia Nieto (1998, 2000, 2001), Carl Grant (1991, 1997), and Christine Sleeter (1995, 2001a, 2001b) have all contributed scholarship to advance this field. These educators have critiqued conceptual frameworks from which multicultural education has been practiced, and they have recommended ways in which multicultural education can become or remain relevant for contemporary pre-service teachers. To help advance practical as well as theoretical knowledge, professional organizations, scholarly journals and major conferences have been created and are devoted to the study and practice of multicultural education. Examples of organizations include the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME), the National Multicultural Institute and the REACH Center for Multicultural Education. Conferences have been established for educators and practitioners and include the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), NAME's annual conference as well as the

annual White Privilege Conference. In addition, several educational organizations, such

as The American Council on Education and The Holmes Group, published reports which

examined the complex issues impacting teachers in diverse classrooms. (Holmes Reports

(1986, 1990, 1995).

Banks and other educators began to expand their ideas about the training needed

for pre-service teachers stating, "teachers must be provided with training and

opportunities that will enable them to examine their own feelings, attitudes and values"

(Banks, 1995. p. 467; Walsh, 2007; Landsman, 2006; Delpit, 2006, 1995; Wise, 2005,

2003; Hughes, 2005; Katz, 2003; Blum, 2002; Howard, 1999; Tatum, 1994, 2000).

Powell agreed with Banks' conclusions and emphatically stated. "I strongly believe that

you cannot deal with human difference until you understand yourself. And confronting

your own culture as whites…is an essential first step" (Powell, 2001, p. 20). Gay also

asserted that teachers must begin their multicultural training with self-reflection and self-

knowledge. She wrote,

> Unless European American teachers seriously analyze and change their cultural
> biases and ethnic prejudices (toward self and others), they are not likely to be very
> diligent and effective in helping students to do likewise. Part of this self-
> examination is unpacking their own ethnicity and understanding themselves as
> racial and cultural beings (Gay, 2000, p. 5).

Howard agreed that "personal transformation" is necessary for teachers to be effective in

creating inclusive classrooms. He stressed,

> We cannot fully and truthfully engage in meaningful dialogue across the
> differences of race and culture without doing the work of personal
> transformation…The inner work of multicultural teaching has been the missing
> piece in the preparation of White teachers…Too often we expect White teachers
> to be what they have not learned to be, namely, multicultural, competent people
> (Howard, 1999, p. 4).

The work of self-reflection, critical thinking and viewing the world through multiple perspectives has now become an integral part of multicultural education training. Like multicultural education as a whole, this approach has received mixed reviews.

Although there have been many champions for multicultural education over the years, it has also been criticized. Historians, politicians and some educators have voiced their views, with opposition running the spectrum from 'multicultural education as political correctness run amok' to 'multicultural education as a threat to American civilization as we know it.' Harvard University professor Nathan Glazer, noted that "…critics see multiculturalism as a term synonymous with all that has gone wrong in American education …in American public life generally" (Glazer, 1997, p. 11). Molefe Asante, Professor of African-American Studies at Temple University, stressed that more to the point, multicultural education demands that we examine a subject that is quite sensitive. He argued,

> One of the biggest issues to be confronted by (Americans) is the historical tendency to denounce anything and anyone that calls attention to the country's dreadful past. It is like talking to someone who has killed his mother. How do you have a real conversation with that person without stumbling over the issue? (Asante, 2003, p. 18).

Indeed, historian and author of <u>Disuniting America</u>, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has expressed his viewpoint of multicultural education as a threat to "a common American identity" and contends that focusing on our separate ethnicity would destroy the very foundation of American society (Schlesinger, 1998, foreword). E. D. Hirsch, Professor of English and author of <u>Cultural Literacy. What Every American Needs to Know</u>, believed that our society's focus should be to ensure that all students possessed a "shared cultural literacy; essential information for a properly educated and unified citizenry" (Hirsch,

1987, preface, p. 18). His work outlined the rationale for this shared knowledge as well as

a list of "what literate Americans know" (Hirsch, 1987, p. Appendix). Although this list

included a number of multicultural references, he, like many, made the assumption that

multicultural education is a thing separate and set apart from 'American culture.' Hirsch

argued, "However laudable it (multicultural education) is, it should not be the focus of

national education. It should not be allowed to supplant or interfere with our schools'

responsibility to ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture" (Hirsch,

1987, p. 18). During the height of the multicultural education movement in the mid-

1990's, politically conservative author and Hoover Institute fellow, Dinesh D'Souza,

described multiculturalism as a "political movement based on denial of Western cultural

superiority" (D'Souza, 1995, p. 18). Seven years later, his criticism and disdain deepened

as he argued,

> The multiculturalists are a powerful, perhaps even dominant, force in American
> high schools and colleges … (They) are teaching our young people that Western
> civilization is defined by oppression. They present American history as an
> uninterrupted series of crimes visited on blacks, American Indians, Hispanics,
> women and natives of the Third World.…Multiculturalists also seek to fill white
> Americans with an overpowering sense of guilt and blame so that they accept
> responsibility for the sufferings of minorities in America and poor people in the
> rest of the world (D'Souza, 2002, pgs. 27-28).

Criticism has also been directed by those who are actually in favor of

multicultural education. Critics often raise the issue of superficiality in misguided

attempts to incorporate multicultural education. University of Iowa Professors Anne

DiPardo and Bruce Fehn, note that "White educators (tend to) reduce multicultural

education to superficial celebrations of 'heroes and holidays,' (or) a 'feasting and festing'

approach that leaves out attention to power and Euro-Americans' complicity in systemic

inequities" (Dipardo and Fehn, 2000, p. 171). Some researchers note that this 'drive-

through' approach is often the only method used by teachers who are not prepared for a more complex understanding of all that multicultural education embodies (Banks, 1995, p. 467; Walsh, 2007; Landsman, 2006; Delpit, 2006, 1995; Wise, 2005, 2003; Hughes, 2005; Katz, 2003; Blum, 2002; Howard, 1999; Tatum, 1994, 2000).

Multicultural education has faced other challenges as well. Since the inception of multicultural programs, there has been little wide-spread, dramatic change in the preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms. Although numerous states did mandate that pre-service teachers add one multicultural course to their requirements, many researchers argue that a single course cannot hope to offer students the full preparation they need to teach in diverse classrooms. (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2001; King, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Zeicher & Hoeft, 1996).

On the national and political front, there has been a backlash against affirmative action and other attempts at equity and diversification of higher education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, January, 2002) has caused many in-service teachers to become extremely concerned with how they are being assessed, "burying issues of diversity under technical notions of equity defined as opportunities for all to be held equally accountable to the same high-stakes test, despite grossly unequal resources and opportunities to learn" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 932). Karen Cary, Professor of Education at California State University, re-emphasized the importance of multicultural teacher preparation even as teachers strive to meet the standards of NCLB. She stressed,

> This is *the* challenge of the 21st century. How we resolve the transformation of
> our culture into a viable cultural home representative of all diversity will
> determine whether or not our democracy survives. Changing the schools and the
> society in which they operate involves a major shift in the thinking and power
> relations that have historically operated to maintain social positions….Clearly, the
> mandate for today's educator is to work to create transformations of the

individuals and the culture within which they live. For … the teacher, this means creating a classroom that is safe for each individual and home for all! (Cary, 2004, p. 10).

While multicultural educators state that the need is more urgent than ever for pre-service teachers to participate in courses that seek to prepare them for diverse classrooms of their own, the original curriculum and classroom practice was developed to serve a population of pre-service teachers quite different from today's 21st century student. Who are the contemporary young men and women embarking on teacher training? How are they different from pre-service teachers of a generation ago?

General Profile of Contemporary Pre-Service Teachers

As previously stated, the majority of pre-service teachers are young, white and female. This statistic has remained consistent, particularly as more people of color leave the teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics website (NCES), 2007; Hodgkinson, 2002). According to some researchers, the current generation of pre-service teachers, (still overwhelmingly students between 18 and 25) are quite unlike students of the past (Hodgkinson, 2002). Dubbed "the Millennial generation," demographers note some rather distinctive characteristics of contemporary students (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Neil Howe and William Strauss, demographic researchers and authors of Millennials Rising. The Next Great Generation, note that this generation, born in or after 1982, will have an enormous impact on contemporary and future American society and on the college campus as well. Howe and Strauss describe Millennials as,

> … numerous. Swelled by a resurgent fertility rate and by the large families of a record immigration surge, they are a giant generation. 76 million strong at the end of 2000, Millennials outnumber boomers and … are well on their way to becoming America's first 100 million person generation … This is America's most racially and ethnically diverse, and least Caucasian, generation. In 1999, non-whites and Latinos accounted for nearly 36 percent of the 18 or under

population … One Millennial in five has at least one immigrant parent, and one in ten has at least one non-citizen parent … (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4, 14-16).

Dr. Ellen Broido, author of "Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students," stated that this generation is "far more likely to be biracial or multiracial than previous generations" (Broido, 2004, p. 75). On issues of multiculturalism and diversity, Broido observed,

> College students of the new millennium are different from their predecessors in many ways, among them having distinct demographic characteristics, views of people different from themselves, political and social values and attitudes about social justice issues. As the Millennial generation brings these differences with them to college, university (staff) need to rethink how they attempt to address social justice and diversity issues (for these students) … (Broido, 2004, p. 73).

The Millennial generation is further characterized as "technologically savvy," becoming the world's first generation to grow up thinking of itself as globally connected (Wilson, 2004, p 65). "This is a generation with no memory of a Cold War or the Civil Rights movement or the 'long hot summers' of race riots, the Vietnam war or subsequent protests, Watergate or Bobby or Martin" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 16). Maureen Wilson, Professor of Education and Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University noted that Millennials have grown up being closely supervised, close to their parents and tend to be "politically conservative, (even) while holding liberal attitudes toward social issues" (Wilson, 2004, p. 65).

As Broido suggested, the Millennials' methods of exploring, receiving and disseminating information is quite different from those of previous generations. This difference impacts virtually every aspect of their lives, including how they will proceed through academia. For example, this generation is generally accustomed to receiving and delivering instant information and conducting research via electronic methods even when more 'traditional' resources are still available to them. Given the proliferation of online

databases and full-text resources that are easily accessible, more students will choose to perform research via online methods rather than spending hours in a library (Wilson, 2004, p. 68). Personal communication with their peers is often conducted by instant or text messages, e-mails or via online social networking sites which are primarily dedicated to their generation. Students sometimes continue classroom discussions online via chatrooms or blogs dedicated to their course. Technology has even infiltrated their classrooms as papers and exams are often transmitted by e-mail attachments or through resources such as Blackboard, a course management system that allows courses to be delivered partially or entirely over the Internet.

This generation has grown up with the availability of global perspectives at their very fingertips. In addition to increased speed, today's pre-service teachers have access to and utilize information in ways which may directly impact their beliefs and perspective of the world (Wilson, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Chideya, 1999; Cress and Sax, 1998). For example, their broadband connectivity influences the amount of information to which they are exposed (e.g. the Internet can bring an extensive global community together instantaneously). Web logs (blogs), internet chat rooms, listservs, resources like Facebook.com or MySpace.com and other online 'neighborhoods' can bring a literal global community of young adults together via the personal computer. This wealth of access has the capacity to increase the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints available to them. If they so choose, they have the ability to interact with others across a wide spectrum of diversity. This amount of access also increases the possibility of having their views reinforced, or challenged, by a larger community.

While on the surface, students' connectivity may seem irrelevant, researchers stress the importance of institutional acknowledgement of the influences of technology on student relationships (e.g. Wilson, 2004; Hirschy and Wilson, 2002). In the area of diversity and multicultural education courses, the ubiquitous nature of technology can challenge personal relationship-building among students, so vital in the learning process (Wilson, 2004, p. 68). For example, relationships are often forged from students' struggles with topics covered in class; multicultural education, by its very nature, requires dialogue about topics that can be quite sensitive. Conversations that are conducted by online methods about these topics can possibly hinder communication as nuances in body language and facial expressions could be missed; misunderstandings may occur more often within online communication because of this. Additionally, relationships between pre-service teachers and their multicultural education professors demand a high level of trust and communication. The intrusion of technology might impact the student/teacher dynamic if students insist on communicating via electronic methods, particularly about topics like race. However, the use of technology can also lend itself to creative methods for classroom participation; for example, online chat rooms or blogs might serve as a continuation of in-class discussions.

What about the Millennials' exposure to those different from themselves before they enter teacher training? When NCATE originally made their recommendations for pre-service teachers to enroll in a required multicultural courses and several states required the same, it was assumed students entering these courses had little, if any exposure to people or cultures who were different from themselves. For example, the research site for this study is located in a state where the minority population for the

entire state was less than 2% during the time when the multicultural education course was first required for teacher certification in 1980 (Schweider, 1996). The assumption that entering students lacked racial experience was a correct one; there was certainly little opportunity for interracial interaction.

Unlike prior generations, contemporary pre-service teachers may begin multicultural education courses with prior knowledge of, experiences with and comfort in interactions with those racially different from themselves. Along with the Internet and changing demographics, popular culture and media may also be a factor here. Serving as a type of bridge between the races, music, movies and television bring a wide variety of information, sights and sounds into the lives of virtually everyone. According to Bartolome and Macedo, both Professors of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, "the popular press and the mass media educate more people about issues regarding ethnicity and race than all other sources of education available to U.S. citizens" (Bartolome and Macedo, 1997, p. 223). This form of education can have a negative impact as well, as the media "distort images of different ethnic and cultural groups…on a day-to-day basis," asserted Carlos E. Cortes, Professor of History at University of California at Riverside (Cortés, 2000, p. 69) In this way, the media may help to reinforce stereotypes and prejudice.

While pre-service teachers' lack of exposure may have been the case in the mid-1970s, given the speed and methods Millennial pre-service teachers use to acquire information, their ability to communicate across cyberspace and rapidly changing demographics across the country, a re-examination of our assumptions about students' previous experience is in order.

Possible Influences on Racial Perspectives

When examining pre-service teachers' views on race before they embark on a

multicultural education course, it is helpful to explore possible influences on their

thinking and belief systems. Race is a complex issue, made more so by society's witness

of significant strides by people of color at the same time that persistent hate crimes

continue to be perpetrated on victims who are black or brown. Michael Brown, Professor

of Community Studies at University of California, Santa Clara, summarizes the

complexity that marks our current racial climate. He writes,

> Demographic changes beginning in the last quarter of the twentieth century
> seriously complicate the meaning of race and racism. As large numbers of Asians
> and Latinos move into America's major urban areas, the politics and economics
> of race are no longer represented in black and white. Old alliances based on race
> have been replaced by new multiracial coalitions. As racial intermarriages
> increase, the very meaning of race has been tangled in ways that were once
> inconceivable. And with the development of black cultural and athletic icons,
> blackness has been transformed from a badge of oppression into an image that is
> desired and emulated. America is now a nation so racially complicated that one
> black person can be secretary of state, while another is racially profiled or
> sodomized in a New York City police station, all in the same historical moment
> (Brown, et al, 2003, p. x).

Multicultural educators agree that long before pre-service teachers enter

multicultural education courses, they have beliefs, attitudes and biases that are not simply

dismissed once they begin their training or their teaching careers (Tatum, 2007;

Landsman, 2006; Wise, 2005; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Howard, 1999; King, J., et al

1997). Part of a larger society, pre-service teachers must juxtapose information and ideas

presented in their multicultural education classes with personal and political views

developed outside the academy. Some students may find their personal perspectives

conflict with lessons they will receive once in their training programs. Multicultural

education curricula, some developed decades prior, may carry tacit assumptions of

congruence between multicultural research theory and a pre-service teacher's beliefs;

assumptions which may prove false. Particularly during this time of war, terrorism and

pointed questions about personal patriotism, students may resist learning about and being

open to the "cultural practices of other people" (Banks, 1997, p. 46). While some students

may feel caught in a metaphorical cross current of racialized events, it is quite possible

that for others, these public issues influence their perspectives before they enter their

multicultural courses.

Events

This generation of pre-service students, while generally "having more open

attitudes towards issues of diversity and social justice, still bear witness to events which

could easily feed prejudice, bigotry and stereotype" (Broido, 2004, p. 76). Recent

examples of such events would include heated debates and protests over illegal

immigration and the patrol of U.S. borders; terrorism brought to U.S. soil by Muslim

terrorists accompanied by a subsequent war; local and Supreme Court cases challenging

the constitutionality of Affirmative Action in higher education; and racial epithets and

racialized slurs freely hurled about by celebrities such as Don Imus, Michael Richards,

Mel Gibson, Rosie O'Donnell (and others) and widely broadcast over the Internet and

other media outlets. A prime example of a disquieting event where issues of race and

class were on full display, was during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans

in August, 2005. Delpit lamented that this event laid bare that "we are not the country we

once believed ourselves to be." She continued,

> The great putrid underbelly of racism and classism in our nation was exposed
> through the tragedy of New Orleans. The horror of nature's attack on a major U.S.
> city has been overshadowed by the distorted attitudes toward those who are darker
> and poorer. Tens of thousands of American citizens were abandoned, suffering a

dearth of food, water, sanitation, and basic medical attention and, in too many instances, left to die from neglect (Delpit, 2006, Preface).

Most recently, Millennials have watched as a very public debate over "who can say what to whom," reached a fever pitch immediately following the Don Imus incident (Time magazine, April 16, 2007; Newsweek magazine, April, 12, 2007). Ellis Cose, author of numerous books on race including, Color-Blind. Seeing Beyond Race in a Race-Obsessed World, summarized the Imus incident.

> Don Imus, of course, is the latest example of an uber-alpha male stuffing his foot in his mouth. It's unclear why he thought it funny to call female basketball players "nappy-headed hos." What is clear is that they were not amused. Their emotion-filled press conference fueled a bonfire of indignation that ultimately engulfed all the efforts to preserve Imus' reputation and career (Cose, 2007, p. 35).

Across the country, people debated the freedom to use racist (as well as sexist and homophobic) language. On talk shows, news shows and raging Internet discussions, pointed questions were raised such as, "Why is it okay for black people to use the 'n' word and white people cannot?" Imus himself made the point that the language he used to describe the mostly African-American Rutgers women's basketball team "did not originate with me" (Today show interview, April, 2007). Although recent rumors of a return to television abound at this time, Imus lost his job because of his words.

James Poniewozik, a writer for Time magazine and cultural critic noted that in the last few years, racialized comments have become so frequent that, "The contrition cycle has become very familiar. You blurt. You deny. You apologize. You visit the rehab center or speak with the Official Minority Spokesperson of your choice and go on with your life" (Poniewozik, 2007, p. 36). Cose observed "a predictable pattern to these things.

Someone prominent – almost always a male – says something indisputably vile. And when his world explodes as a result, he belatedly begs forgiveness" (Cose, 2007, p. 35).

Contemporary pre-service teachers bear witness to events and images that expose them to complex messages about race. American society is documented – for the better or worse – by ever expanding media coverage. The Internet, family influences, interpersonal relations across races, and social interactions all contribute to this complexity. It is uncertain how this perplexing landscape might affect pre-service teachers' experiences and ability to engage in racial dialogue. This study seeks to explore if these possible influences - exposure to a rapidly increasingly multicultural society, lightening speed technology with the ability to connect people on a global scale, and widely publicized media events that bring race to the forefront - have any impact on the student participants' experiences with race.

CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will explore the ideas of selected researchers about the relevance of

race for contemporary society in general and for pre-service teachers in particular. In

addition, this chapter will explore the concept of racial dialogue. how race is discussed by

whites in public settings and the challenges that may impede these conversations. Finally,

this chapter will conclude with a discussion on how pre-service teachers themselves

generally discuss race within the context of their education courses. Examination of these

ideas will connect to the purpose of the study. an inquisition into the racial attitudes,

beliefs and experiences of a select group of white pre-service teachers before they

embark on their required multicultural education course. This chapter will contribute to

the study as an examination of the milieu pre-service teachers may draw from as they

enter their multicultural education courses where they are expected to participate in

dialogue about race.

The Relevance Of Race

Does the concept of race have any relevancy for this generation of students

entering multicultural education courses? The research indicates that there may be

conflicting responses to this question. Banks believes that "(Students) come to school

with many negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about different racial and ethnic

groups" (Banks in Howard, 1999. p. ix). Yet Farai Chideya, author of several books on

contemporary race in America including The Color Of Our Future. Race for the 21st

Century, argues that Millennials

> … in their teens and twenties see firsthand evidence in their own schools and
> neighborhoods that America is becoming less white and more racially mixed.
> America's pop culture today is infinitely more likely to show blacks as well as

whites (though other races often remain unseen). The billion dollar hip-hop industry, produced by blacks but driven by sales to young fans of all races, is one indicator of the cultural shift. Even more significant, 80 percent of teens have a close friend of another race. (Given all this), how and how much we experience racial diversity varies widely, and it depends on everything from geography to income (Chideya, 1999, p. 17).

Kransdorf asserts that the cultural shift that Chideya references may be superficial on some levels. She argued that increased racial interaction does not necessarily influence the racial competency of pre-service teachers. In her work entitled, "Challenging Racial Attitudes Through Emotion And Content," Kransdorf noted.

A common problem in working with racial attitudes of our pre-service teachers is their lack of experience and understanding of other perspectives and viewpoints. They see issues of diversity and race in school as historical issues that have little if, any relevance to their current lives as students or their future lives as teachers (Kransdorf, et. al. 2005, p. 233).

Pre-service teachers then, when confronted with issues of race in their courses, may not understand the relevance of race in contemporary society (Broido, 2004). Perhaps contributing to their confusion is evidence of racial progress in some areas. Social and economic progress of various racial groups as well as continued integration in virtually all facets of American and international life could support the notion that race is no longer a relevant concern. Broido asserted,

This generation, more than any previous, grew up aware of interracial couples, people of color in high profile governmental positions and a growing middle class of African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans. Overt expressions of racism are increasingly rare on college campuses, although they certainly still occur (Broido, 2004, p. 77).

Political writer, Professor of Religious Studies and social commentator Michael Eric Dyson, agrees that contemporary issues of race and "vitriolic expressions of racism" are now much more subtle, owing much to the challenges posed and victories won during the civil rights movement of the 1960's (Dyson, 1997, p. 215). Since the Millennial

generation may not ever be *directly* exposed to acts of outright racism and bigotry as were previous generations, (as opposed to rather passively witnessing incidents on television or on the Internet), this may fuel their doubts of the relevance of race in modern society. In addition, Howe and Strauss note that when race is considered, Millennials "have a more expansive understanding…one that better reflects the demographics of people of color in the U.S." They note that unlike previous generations, Millennials "no longer see race as a black-white issue. It is commonly understood to include Latino and Asian people, and people of all nationalities" (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 105).

Not all envision an interracial utopia, however. While research may support a generation more prone to "respecting cultural differences," Sax noted that in the latest Cooperative Institutional Research Program (2002) survey, "students are less committed to (actually) working on important issues such as … race relations" (Sax, 2003, p. 19). This suggests that students' philosophical beliefs may be inconsistent with any notion of activism. Broido supports this idea and believes that the reality of "increased numbers of people of color does not necessarily translate into increased intergroup contact, particularly between whites and people of color" (Broido, 2004, p. 74). Even with an increase in intermarriage and burgeoning immigration from Asia, Africa and Latin American countries, the changing face of America has not been accepted well by everyone, regardless of age. Chideya asserted,

> The very idea that America will become 'majority-minority' scares the hell out of some people. That's why we find ourselves not only at a point of incredible change, but of incredible fear. (There has been) a full-scale backlash against immigrants and nonwhites, both in word and in deed. As the visibility of nonwhites has been rising, hate crimes have too – with attacks on increasingly visible Asian Americans rising the fastest.…The message that America has 'gone

too far' toward embracing minorities is being shouted out from the lecterns at Washington think tanks and neighborhood bar stools alike. This is widely seen as the revenge of the angry white male (Chideya, 1999, p. 22-3).

While pre-service teachers may struggle to make sense of the relevancy of race, an activist, other researchers and a president also weighed in on this subject. Many of them believe that because acts of personal and institutionalized racism still exist, the concept of race is as relevant as ever. Tim Wise, anti-racist social activist and author of White Like Me, believes in the essential and profound presence of race in all our lives. He argued,

> We are all experiencing race, because from the beginning of our lives we have been living in a racialized society, where the color of our skin means something, even while it remains a matter of biological and genetic irrelevance. Race may be a scientific fiction, but it is a social fact. one that none of us can escape no matter how much or how little we talk about it (Wise, 2005, p. viii).

Brown notes that while racial progress has been made,

> … there is still substantial (and) direct racial discrimination in many areas of American life. It is true … that things are not what they were during Jim Crow. It is emphatically not true, however, that overt discriminatory practices have largely disappeared from American life … (Brown, et. al, 2003, p. 226).

While Brown does not deny the economic advances of black Americans since the 1960's, he stresses that the persistence of racism and its hold on institutions in American society - including the labor market, the welfare system, the criminal justice system, and educational institutions - keeps race at the center of life, particularly for people of color.

Cornel West, Professor of Religion and African American Studies at Princeton University, declaratively stated in the title of his highly acclaimed work, that indeed, Race Matters (West, C., 1999, 1993). His seminal work explored the deleterious effects of race and racism in North America, and contends that race is the very foundation on

which this country has always operated and remains influential to this day. West

emphasized,

> … Whenever you have a civilization that is shaped by 244 years of chattel
> slavery, enslavement of African people, and 81 years of Jim Crow, minstrels as
> the first national pastime, jazz as its highest art form, you can't claim that race has
> not been a fundamental construct that has shaped how we've gone about making
> sense of the world. And as constructed as the concept of race is, its effects and
> consequences through culture have been immense and will continue to be
> immense far into the twenty-first century (West, 1999, p. 29-30).

Derrick Bell, Professor of Law at New York University and author of Faces at the

Bottom of the Well. The Permanence of Racism, argued that in contemporary America,

race and issues of racism still "lie at the center, not the periphery, in the permanent, not in

the fleeting, in the real lives of black and white people, not in the sentimental caverns of

the mind" (Bell, 1992, p. 198). Audrey Smedley, Professor of Anthropology at Virginia

Commonwealth University and author of Race in North America, also agreed that the

issue of race still bears relevance. She argued.

> Race is the major mode of social differentiation in American society, it cuts
> across and takes priority over social class, education, occupation, gender, age,
> religion, culture (ethnicity) and other differences. It is essential, then, to
> understand race as a socio-cultural reality independent of the history and uses of
> the concept in science (Smedley, 1999, p. 20).

In his work entitled, Racism Without Racists. Color-Blind Racism And The Persistence

of Racial Inequality In The United States, Duke University Professor of Sociology,

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva consents that "Racial considerations shade almost everything in

America. For people of color, race touches virtually every facet of their lives" (Bonilla-

Silva, 2003, p. 1).

In academia, Dyson argued that "race should be at the core of our classrooms just

as it should be at the center of our conversations in every discipline." He continued,

It does not simply belong in a class on ethnic studies or African-American culture. Race belongs in a class on Aristotelian conceptions of inequality, for example, or in a course on Neoplatonic philosophy. It belongs in a discussion of every imaginable subject matter, especially in this country … We would be well served to be more explicit about race and therefore take it into account rather than allow it to inform our debates from a distance … (Dyson, 2003, p. 84).

Race and racism are being studied in new ways. 'Whiteness studies' and studies on 'white privilege' developed and continue as a means of exploring the impact of race and privilege on the lives of people of color as well as for white people. DiPardo and Fehn stress that in order to "understand better the issues and complexities that arise where white teachers attempt to engage students in discussion of race … whiteness – with its requisite implications of privilege and de-privileging must also be explored" (DiPardo and Fehn, 200, p. 186). Racial identity development is another example of theories designed to assist in traversing the racial terrain. Originally developed in the 1960's by William Cross and refined and expanded in recent years by numerous scholars, this theory posits that everyone passes through several developmental states on their path to a racial identity. Researchers believe that the knowledge of racial identity development models can help to improve race relations for all involved by providing a model for understanding (e.g. See Tatum, 1994; Hardiman and Jackson, 1992; Helms, 1984).

In 1997, race remained important enough of an issue for a sitting President of the United States to call for a "great and unprecedented national conversation on race." In his second administration, President Bill Clinton stated, "Of all the questions of discrimination and prejudice that still exists in our society, the most perplexing one is the oldest, and in some ways today the newest. the problem of race" (Clinton, B. 1997 commencement address). The President formed an advisory board and named this effort "One America in the 21st Century. The President's Initiative on Race" (Boston Globe.

June 12, 2000, p. A1). In 1998, the Advisory Board issued its perspective on the

continued significance of race.

> Our nation still struggles with the impact of its past policies, practices and attitudes based on racial difference. Race and ethnicity will have profound impacts on the extent to which a person is fully included in American society and provided the equal opportunity and equal protection promised to all Americans. All these characteristics continue to affect an individual's opportunity to receive an education, acquire the skills necessary to maintain a good job, have access to adequate health care and receive equal justice under the law (President's Initiative on Race, 1998).

The Board devised a strategic plan which included goals to find ways to "increase the

nation's understanding of the history of race relations and to embrace the common future

people all races share … and to propose actions to address critical areas such as

education…" (William J. Clinton Foundation website, http.//www.clintonfounda-

tion.org/legacy). Critics of the plan felt that while President Clinton's intentions may

have been altruistic, his methods left much to be desired. G. Geyer, a journalist for the

New Orleans Times Picayune wrote,

> The problem is that the Clinton approach, which stresses eternal white guilt and black helplessness, is simply no longer applicable to the reality of the country today. Non-prejudiced white people are saying, "Hey, I'm not guilty, and I'm tired of the guilt game," and capable, independent-minded African-Americans are saying, "I want justice and not all your self-interested 'privileges.' They actually are designed to tell me I can never make it on my own (Geyer, G. 1999, B5).

In the end, the President's Initiative did not accomplish its goals and the Bush

administration has not attempted to pursue similar initiatives.

Race No Longer Matters, Does it?

There are those who support the notion of the irrelevancy of race in society and

who feel that continued attention given to race only serves to divide the nation rather than

unite it (e.g. Bennett, 1992, Schlesinger, 1998, Cheney, 1995). Yale University political

scientist Jim Sleeper, author of <u>Liberal Racism. How Fixating on Race Subverts the American Dream,</u> asserted what he claims to be the sentiments of "numerous racial conservatives" who believe that there is a gain to be had by ignoring "evidence of racial harmony, of blacks and whites working together or of growing intermarriage between blacks and whites. Instead (liberals) favor a portrait of America as irredeemably racist" (Sleeper, 1997, p. 77-78). Other racial conservatives such as D'Souza, author of <u>The End of Racism</u>, and Shelby Steele, author of <u>The Content Of Our Character. A New Vision Of Race in America</u>, maintain that race is irrelevant and that America has made great progress in rectifying racial injustice in the past thirty-five years. D'Souza, observed that,

> When one examines the policies of universities, companies, and the government, one finds that they actually discriminate in *favor* of African-Americans and other minority groups, and against white males. Socially most Americans go out of their way to cater to, and to avoid offending, blacks. Such measures seem unlikely in a racist society. There are specific incidents of racism and specific victims, to be sure. But the very fact that we can identify them proves that they are not typical, and the ensuing outcry shows the degree to which racism has become stigmatized in American society (D'Souza, 2002, p. 119).

As for the argument of continued economic inequity, D'Souza concludes that "merit, not racism" and "the lack of two-parent families and (high) illegitimacy rates are at the root of disparate levels of success in virtually every area of American life for folks of color." D'Souza also suspects that evidence of success in the lives of minorities is not "publicized because it disrupts the profitable narrative of victimization" (D'Souza, 2002, p. 126-7). Steele also stressed that there are advantages to people of color holding on to a "victim-focused mentality" (Steele, 1991, p. 169-1700. He argued,

> Our victimization itself has been our primary source of power in society-the basis of our demands for redress. (The) paradoxical result of relying on this source of power is that it rewards us for continuing to see ourselves as victims of a racist society (Steele, 1991, p. 170).

Ultimately, Steele's belief is that people of color, particularly African-Americans, do more harm to themselves by focusing on racism and oppression (Steele, 1991, p. 169-170).

Those who support the notion that race is irrelevant in the 21st century point to numerous gains for people of color in this country, a direct result of the sacrifice, hard work, tenacity and moral compass of both people of color and whites striving for justice. Although the results of this struggle for equality are mixed, every racial group can now point to members of their population who are 'successful' in spite of their challenges. In business, people of color can be found as CEO's of major corporations (e.g. Time Warner, American Express, the FCC, Xerox), as well as most levels in the business environment. In politics, people of color are represented in all levels of government, including the highest levels of the current Republican administration (e.g. Secretary of State and Attorney General). Senator Barack Obama, who is biracial, is an extremely competitive candidate in the 2008 presidential election. Black and brown people have been represented in the sports arena and that trend has continued with more people of color being represented in sports management and administration as well as on the playing fields. Although still not proportionally reflective of the country's demographic reality, people of color are represented in popular media as never before (to mixed reviews in terms of the accuracy of their depictions and stereotyping). There is a growing middle class with a representative number of people of color. In an interesting turn of events, there are a growing number of decades-old famous hate crimes against African-Americans that are being re-tried, with white defendants (now elderly) being convicted and sent to prison. In some sectors, hard-fought battles for integration and acceptance

seem to be successful. It is rather common to find people of different races forming friendships, inter-marrying, working and attending schools and churches together. Although Dr. Martin Luther King once called Sundays at 11 a.m. "the most segregated hour in this nation" (1963 speech given at Western Michigan University), it is not uncommon to witness multiracial congregations attending worship services together.

As for individual response to the belief that race is irrelevant, researchers point to two phenomena often exhibited by whites. 'color-blindness' and the act of 'normalizing' whiteness. Color-blindness is characterized as an attempt to minimize or completely ignore racial differences, ostensibly as a pre-cursor to fair and equitable treatment. Examples of the 'colorblind perspective' include. 'I was raised not to see color. I have always treated everyone the same. I see people as individuals not as members of a racial group.' Dr. Janet Schofield, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, studied the concept of color-blindness and its impact on students and noted, "The declaration of color-blindness assumes that we can erase our racial categories, ignore differences, and thereby achieve an illusory state of sameness or equality. The colorblind perspective treats race as an irrelevant, invisible, and taboo topic" (Schofield, 1997, p. 53). In her work entitled, Causes and Consequences of the Colorblind Perspective, Schofield argued that although this perspective appears to be a benign attempt to eliminate bigotry, it also has negative consequences, particularly in the education of students. She posits,

> Although the colorblind perspective and its corollaries served some useful purposes such as minimizing social awkwardness in certain situations, they also had several unrecognized negative effects. One important consequence of this mind set was a predisposition to ignore or deny the possibility of cultural differences between White and Black children which influenced the way they functioned in school (Schofield, 1997, p. 265).

Harvard Associate Professor, John Diamond, argued that "A color-blind discourse which

suggests we should not talk about color, has been used to undermine efforts to create

more equity. To ignore race can lead us to overlook its significance and help to

perpetuate inequality" (Diamond, 2007, p. 19). Howard notes that connected to the

color-blind perspective is the unspoken idea that difference is problematic and must be

ignored. He noted that for some, the mere acknowledgement of racial difference suggests

their own racism; conversely their lack of attention to racial differences proves their

sophistication. He continued,

> For these people, the mere existence of the difference causes discomfort and must
> be ignored or denied. Of course, the underlying assumption is that human
> difference in itself is a problem … 'We are all the same' translates to 'We are all
> like me,' which is comforting for those who are accustomed to dominance…. The
> belief in the sameness of human beings actually denies the authentic existence of
> people whose experiences of reality (are) different (Howard, 1999, p. 53,4).

> Closely tied to the color-blind perspective is the idea of whiteness as "normal."

The act of normalizing whiteness is so pervasive that it can generally go unnoticed,

except by those who are impacted by its opposite. marginalization. Normalizing of

whiteness is frequently on display in the media, particularly local or national newscasts

when descriptions of people are given. Julie Landsman, author of <u>A White Teacher Talks</u>

<u>About Race</u>, noted,

> … race is a marker for 'the other.' When we refer to a person without further
> description, the social norm is white (and male and straight and not disabled). We
> typically refer to the 'black lawyer' or the 'woman doctor.' The assumptions
> embedded in the language enshrine whiteness and white privilege. If you are
> white, you need no further description (Landsman, 2001, p. xv).

This researcher noted the practice of normalizing while listening to an innocuous NPR

segment featuring a white student's audio diary about an upcoming trip overseas. When

the host raised the topic of race, the student stated, "I'm not a race, I'm just normal." (National Public Radio. 8/8/05). Joyce King, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic and Diversity Programs at the University of New Orleans, coined the phrase "dysconscious racism" to describe the acceptance of whiteness and white culture as 'the norm' against which everyone else is measured. She expounded,

> 'Dysconscious racism' is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages white people have as a result of subordinating others (King, 1997. In Delgado, et al, p. 128).

Wise has contemplated the question, "What does it mean to be white?" and noted that privilege allows one to ignore the question. He continued,

> We don't often ask this question, mostly because we don't have to. Being a member of the majority, the dominant group, allows one to ignore how race shapes one's life. For us, whiteness simply is, it becomes the unspoken, un-interrogated norm, taken for granted … (Wise, 2005, p. 2-3)

Lawrence Blum, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, and author of I'm Not a Racist, but …, argues that the concept of 'whiteness' has a long history and was "built into the structure of American society" which has helped to normalize their race to the point of inconsequentiality. He expounded,

> … As the dominant group they did not have to think about their whiteness or what it consisted in. They constituted the norm, the "we" against whom the various inferiorized "they's" were defined. Thus whiteness was always a kind of inexplicit identity to those who possessed it … (Blum, 2002, p. 148).

Brown summarized that the act of normalizing race is a rather 'typical' experience of white Americans, particularly when the issue of race is opened for examination or discussion. He noted,

According to a well-known philosophical maxim, the last thing a fish notices is the water. Fish take the water they swim in for granted, just as European Americans take their race as a given, as normal. White Americans may face difficulties in life - problems having to do with money, religion or family - but race is not one of them. White Americans can be sanguine about racial matters because their race has not been (until recently) visible to the society in which they live. They cannot see how this society produces advantages for them because these benefits seem so natural that they are taken for granted, experienced as wholly legitimate (Brown, et al. 2003, p. 34).

Racial Dialogue

No matter what approach is taken, race remains a loaded topic. Embarrassment, shame, guilt or anger are emotions expressed by adults as they have struggled to deal with race and racial dialogue. Even with the challenges it presents, race remains a topic that is difficult to avoid, partially because "it permeates so much of the way we live" and seems to surface – one way or another – on a fairly consistent basis (Cahill, 2003. p. 304). Attempts to discuss race, particularly when it is 'forced' (as in mandatory training for employment or education, for example), often produces discomfort, resentfulness, disdain, silence, even anger. Tatum observed that " … (Whites) are concerned about inadvertently saying something stupid or hurtful and embarrassing themselves or offending people from other ethnic groups" (Tatum, 1997, p. 199). However, Asante speculated that whites' concerns go much deeper than embarrassment. He contended that their reluctance to openly discuss issues of race is directly tied to the unwillingness by whites to confront this country's past. He argued,

> To discuss race means to tackle white supremacy as an ideology, conscious or unconscious, in the American psyche … One of the biggest issues to be confronted by the American democracy is the historical tendency to denounce anything and anyone that calls attention to the country's dreadful past. It is like talking to someone who has killed his mother. How do you have a real conversation with that person without stumbling over the issue? (Asante, 2003, p. 16, 18).

Racial dialogue can become particularly sensitive or volatile when whites find themselves in the company of an interracial group or a white person who dares to protest when offended, even if the offense is not directed at them. Katherine Cramer Walsh, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, noted, "Bringing up the topic of race in interracial settings is generally treated as a potential for disaster by politicians and ordinary citizens alike" (Walsh, 2007. p. 2). She continued,

> Public talk, particularly about race, is notoriously difficult. It runs the risk of dwelling on one's own role in perpetuating intergroup conflict and discrimination. It has the potential to bring painful memories to the surface. It also creates a space for people to say out loud damaging stereotypes, thereby possibly legitimating racist talk. Many people prefer to avoid the topic of race because the issue is simply too complex and painful (Walsh, 2007, p. 72-3).

Watchel noted that "outright insults and directly hostile comments are, of course, obvious contributors to the perpetuation of our divisions" in attempts to cross racial divides through dialogue (Watchel, 1999, p. 23). Watchel also points to another issue which impedes productive racial dialogue,

> Less readily understood is the impact of what we do not say, the ways in which communication is blocked or inhibited. In different ways, both sides are afraid they will say something that confirms the stereotype the other holds of them. As a consequence, conversations between blacks and whites are often stilted and restrained (Watchel, 1999, p. 23).

Adding to the restraint of open dialogue is the concept of political correctness. Essentially defined as the alteration or suppression of language, politically correct speech was originally conceptualized as a way to redress discrimination, or to avoid offense. The concept of using politically correct speech was to "bring peoples' unconscious biases into awareness, allowing them to make a more informed choice about their language and making them aware of things different people might find offensive" (Lind, B. http.//www.academia.org/lectures/lind1.html). This concept has become controversial in

recent years and has experienced a form of backlash as accusations of censorship have been made. Others complain that "the use of specialized, politically correct jargon creates a separate status for the groups referred to, and thus prevents integration and acceptance while perpetuating stereotypes" (Lind, B. http.//www.academia.org/ lectures/lind1.html). In addition, Tatum notes that "political correctness (can be) so strong that honest and substantive discussions often cannot occur" (Tatum, 1997, p. 199).

Chideya emphasizes that in spite of the fact that American life has always been multicultural, dialogue about race "is almost always framed as bipolar – the children of slaves versus the children of slave-owners – even when the issues impact Asians, Latinos and Native Americans as well" (Chideya, 1999, p. 6). Her observation about the nature of racial dialogue is noted throughout the research, as several scholars refer to strained relations between 'blacks and whites'. Chideya continued,

> How we perceive race, and how it's depicted in print and on television, has less to do with demographic reality than our mind-set. In the basest and most stereotypic terms, white Americans are considered "true" Americans; black Americans are considered inferior Americans; Asians and Latinos are too often considered foreigners; and Native Americans are rarely thought of at all (Chideya, 1999. p. 7).

West also noted the connection between the quality of any discussion of race and our inherent perceptions. He asserted,

> To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society - flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. (For example) as long as black people are viewed as a "them," the burden falls on blacks to do all the cultural and moral work necessary for healthy race relations (West, 1993. p. 3).

If it is true that our thoughts drive our communication, it would then be reasonable to assume then that racial dialogue can often be rife with mis-communication,

stereotype, prejudice and bigotry. While not ignoring the very real impact of talk that is racist and truly threatening, even statements made without malicious intent can be received in a manner that may feel offensive and insulting. This level of disconnect in our attempt to communicate should be expected given our racial history and the fact that training in racial dialogue is not generally taught in school or family systems. One suspects that when many white children, naturally curious, inquire about any topics dealing with race, adult response would be to typically suppress their conversation or questions. Parents and teachers may even assume that children do not notice difference. Tatum asserted, "Whites hesitate to speak to children about racism for fear they will create problems where perhaps none exist, afraid they will make 'color-blind' children unnecessarily color-conscious" (Tatum, 1997, p. xvi). Sleeter and Grant argued, however, that

> By age 2 or 3, children are aware of visible differences among people, including skin color.…Noting the degree to which children play together, teachers will sometimes comment that because children don't 'see race' the teacher should not bring up the subject of differences. A more accurate interpretation is that the children have not yet learned the meanings society attaches to the differences the children do see. As they mature, they will be bombarded with interpretations of human characteristics. in the media, at school, at home, in jokes and stories from friends (Sleeter & Grant, 1999, p. 81).

Walsh stressed that racial dialogue offers "opportunities to examine why, under what conditions, and how people are using face to face conversations to listen to, scrutinize, and make sense of racial difference" (Walsh, 2007, p. x, 5). Although Tatum noted the important role that dialogue plays in working toward a socially just society, she touched on an area that bears consideration. who is responsible for initiating and guiding racial discussions. She wrote.

> Talking about race is an essential part of facing racism and changing it. But it is not the only part. I am painfully aware that people of color have been talking about racism for a long time. Many people of color are tired of talking, frustrated that talk has not lead to enough constructive action or meaningful social change (Tatum, 1997. p. xix).

Given the nature of race in American society, it has been necessary for people of color to discuss race with candor and regularity, very often passing anecdotes or lessons on to children and adults alike as a means of survival.

What are some other experiences white people have around racial dialogue? Several themes emerged when examining how whites generally talk about race. isolation, silence, guilt and fear predominate.

Isolation

Although the issue of race is pervasive and becoming more so with our country's demographic shift, sheer numbers alone have not closed the 'racial divide.' In terms of our experiences and ability to have dialogue beyond a superficial level, we are quite sheltered from each other. In other words, up to this point in our history, there has not been consistent and compelling reasons for white people to extend beyond their comfort zones to interact with those who are racially and culturally different from themselves. Judith Katz, Associate Professor at San Diego State and author of White Awareness, stressed,

> The attitude seems to be that if people of color are not physically present, the problem of racism does not exist…. Even in multicultural education programs that are attempting to break down rigid cultural barriers, we find a great deal of emphasis on appreciation of differences but little implementation of these concepts in all-white areas, where the cultural isolation may be the greatest (Katz, 2003, p. 4, 8).

Some researchers posit that isolation seems to be an underlying reality of whites' experience of race and that this experiential chasm lends itself to stereotypes, distortions

and is often the fuel for prejudice and bigotry as well as a lack of opportunity and experience to have racial dialogue (e.g. Wise, 2005; Asante, 2003; Barnes, 2000; West, 1999, 1993; Bell, 1992). Tim Wise noted that for many white people in the United States, isolation from others has become the norm and that "although white Americans often think we've had few first-hand experiences with race … the reality is that this isolation *is* our experience with race (Wise, 2005, p. viii). The ability to choose and remain "culturally isolated" while surrounded by a world that is increasingly comprised of people who are brown, yellow, red and many shades in between, is a clear example of white privilege (Howard, 1999, p. 3). Tatum contends that for whites, isolation begins a 'slippery slope' of being "disconnected from (their own) racial experiences" and thereby not noticing the realities of the experiences of others. She asserted,

> In order to prevent chronic discomfort, whites may learn not to notice. But in not noticing, one loses opportunities for greater insight into oneself and one's experience. A significant dimension of who one is in the world, one's whiteness, remains uninvestigated and perceptions of daily experience are routinely distorted. Privilege goes unnoticed and all but the most blatant acts of racial bigotry are ignored (Tatum, 1997, p. 201).

While some may view isolation as insignificant, Tobin Shearer, author of White Spaces, identifies isolation as one of the many ways that racism "hurts us and holds us back" and stresses the importance of consciously working to reach past racial and cultural boundaries (Shearer, 2002. p. 16). It is clear that isolation is a barrier to our ability to have positive, productive racial dialogue.

Silence About Race

In examining the research on how whites generally talk about race or racial topics, silence is another theme that emerges. Although in workshops or training sessions, facilitators often work diligently to create the proverbial 'safe space' to encourage

dialogue, race is a subject still perceived by many whites as a minefield waiting to

explode. Tatum warned,

> …as a society, we pay a price for our silence…unchallenged personal, cultural
> and institutional racism (which) results in the loss of human potential, lowered
> productivity and a rising tide of fear and violence…We need to continually break
> the silence about race and racism whenever we can. We need to talk about it at
> home, at school, in our houses of worship, in our workplaces, in our community
> groups. But talk does not mean idle chatter. It means meaningful, productive
> dialogue to raise consciousness and lead to effective action and social change
> (Tatum, 1997, p. 193, 200).

Researchers point to myriad reasons for silence around this subject. Some whites seem to

fear that focusing any explicit attention to the issue of race will have detrimental effects;

that any focus on race is in itself, inherently racist (Boltgatz, 2005; Blum, 2002; Watchel,

1999).

Guilt

It is common to find in workshops and classrooms, whites who experience

discussion about race from a guilt perspective. Particularly for whites who are new to

open discussions about race or the concept of white privilege and if the group dynamics

are interracial, these discussions can bring about emotional pain which often turns to

guilt. Tatum stressed,

> These uncomfortable emotions can hinder further discussion. We all like to think
> that we deserve the good things we have received, and that others, too, get what
> they deserve. Social psychologists call this tendency a 'belief in a just world'
> (Tatum, 1997, p. 9).

Discussions about race often unveil harsh realities about long-held beliefs in a just and

meritocratic system. Powell has observed that with "guilt often comes the attempt to

absolve oneself of it; for example one might state, 'My ancestors may have contributed to

a racist system, but what does that have to do with me? That was then and now is now.'"

(Powell, 2001. p. 20). Watchel warned of the unexpected turn that feelings of guilt might

elicit.

> Guilt is a complex emotion and does not always produce the response we might
> wish or expect. Sometimes, to be sure, it leads to efforts to right the wrong one
> has done. But very often, especially if guilt threatens to be overwhelming, the
> response to guilt can be paradoxical. still further insensitivity to those we have
> harmed, and anger at them for confronting us with our inadequacies and inequities
> (Watchel, 1999, p. 30).

Silence and guilt around racial topics can often mask an underlying sense of fear. When

researching how whites talk about race, fear, of a number of things, begins to surface.

Fear

Fear seems to dominate any examination on how whites engage in racial dialogue.

Researchers point to two primary reasons for this fear. fear of offending others, and fear

of being labeled a racist. The fear of offending others is often palpable when participating

in racial dialogue. Fueled by the 'politically correct movement' previously discussed, it

has ironically had the negative effect of instilling fear and resentment as white people

have become extremely afraid of offending others. Landsman explained,

> Many of us (white people) are nervous talking about race. We are often afraid we
> will say the wrong thing and so we say nothing. We become quiet, defensive,
> ashamed, or unwilling to respond. We pretend that racial differences do not exist;
> we are all alike under the skin, aren't we? (Landsman, 2001, p. xi).

Rather than eliminate language that may be considered offensive or racist, the politically

correct 'movement' seems to have pushed racial talk 'underground'. Cahill noted "Coded

and implicit in our language in words such as 'safe,' 'urban,' or even the ubiquitous term

'minority,' race is like the "eight hundred pound gorilla that never gets addressed head

on" (Cahill, 2003, p. 304). Katz asserted that discussions on race are often redirected to

avoid conflict or misunderstandings.

Instead of talking about race and racism, we deflect our conversation with vague references to "culture," "diversity," "differences," "cross-cultural effectiveness," and so on. Instead of talking about the present-day impact of our history, we congratulate ourselves on how far we have come and how progressive we now seem. Because race has been such a contentious and difficult subject for many, we talk around it rather than address it head-on (Katz, 2003, p. 3).

Watchel has pointed out that the fear of venturing into racial dialogue and being labeled a racist, is a veritable "conversation stopper." He expounded,

> When whites walk on eggshells in their interactions with blacks, fearing that to express their views in all their complexity would leave them open to the accusation of being racists, all that results is a covering over of real issues and feelings that are essential to address if any progress in race relations is to be made. When "I disagree" or "You don't understand" or "You don't know the facts" or even "You're wrong" becomes "You're racist," real dialogue ceases" (Watchel, 1999, p. 27).

Given the overuse and "conceptual inflation" of the label 'racist' to encompass almost any interaction, it is not surprising that there is real concern about the possibility of this accusation (Blum, 2002, p. viii). Blum argued that the word 'racist' has been thrown about almost with abandon and attached to any action or any statement for which one does not agree. This recklessness only adds to whites' fear of discussing issues related to race. He stressed,

> … The moral reproach carried by the term is threatened by a current tendency to overuse it. Some feel that the word is thrown around so much that anything involving 'race' that someone does not like is liable to castigation as 'racist.' … (For example) A local newspaper called certain blacks 'racist' for criticizing other blacks who supported a white over a black candidate for mayor. A white girl in Virginia said it was 'racist' for an African-American teacher in her school to wear African attire. The Milton, Wisconsin school board voted to retire its 'Redmen' name and logo depicting a Native American wearing a headdress, because they had been criticized as 'racist.' Merely mentioning someone's race (or racial designation), using the word 'Oriental' for Asians without recognizing its origins and its capacity for insult, or socializing only with members of one's own racial group are called 'racist' (Blum, 2002, p. 1).

As previously discussed, historical and contemporary examples abound on the consequences of a white person making comments that are perceived to be insensitive or outright racist.

How Higher Education Students Talk About Race

Michael Blanding stressed in an article entitled "Can We Talk?" that "Few topics in the classroom engender such a volatile emotional response." He continued,

> For some students, race is tied up so closely with their identity, it's impossible to treat dispassionately. For others, race is a topic they've barely investigated, making them reluctant to talk about it at all. For still others, it touches a raw nerve of defensiveness about their own privilege, causing them to lash out and deny its validity (Blanding, 2007, p. 18).

Powell noted that racial dialogue is never easy for anyone and it forces us to deal with issues most people would probably rather avoid. Difference, privilege, history, oppression are sensitive subjects that must be confronted if racial dialogue is to be attempted. For pre-service teachers, many who may have limited experience with racial dialogue, tackling the subject of race and racism can be particularly difficult. Powell stressed,

> Talking about issues relating to human diversity is not easy; it can produce controversy because we are forced to deal with our differences. On the other hand, unless we talk about those differences, we can never reach common ground…Education that is multicultural involves talk – dialogue – about our similarities and differences as human beings and the social (and political and economic) issues that evolve from those differences (Powell, 2001, p. 10).

Returning to the idea that college classrooms are mirrors of the larger society; students are generally reticent in discussing race as well. "Resistance by pre-service teachers can take many forms," Gay noted, "including fear, denial of the verity of ethnic and cultural diversity in teaching and learning, and reluctance to confront issues of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity" (Gay, 2000, p. 2). Rahima Wade, Professor of Elementary Social

Studies at the University of Iowa, noticed resistance to engaging in discussions about race and diversity among her pre-service teachers. This resistance generally fell into five categories she termed "brick walls" (Wade, 1998, p. 84). She stressed,

> Each brick wall functions as a barrier to misunderstanding and appreciating diversity and multicultural education. (The brick walls are). 1) I don't have any prejudices; 2) My attitudes won't affect my students; 3) I'm not going to teach 'those' students; 4) All I have to do is teach about countries and cultures and; 5) Life is fine. We don't need to change anything (Wade, 1998, p. 85).

> Boltgatz envisioned students' ability to converse about race as essential as any

other part of the educational process and a function of being literate. Calling this skill "racial literacy," she argued,

> Just as students need to be literate in traditional ways - able to read, write and compute - they also need to be … racially literate. able to talk with people in order to understand and address racially loaded controversies … Being racially literate means being able to interact with others to challenge undemocratic practices. Racially literate students are willing to break the taboos of talking about race. They can hear and appreciate diverse and unfamiliar experiences. They are genuine about their feelings. They recognize that they have much to learn and they know how to ask questions. Cultivating racial literacy takes courage (Boltgatz, 2005, p. 1-2).

Landsman also noted the gift of dialogue within the education process. She argued that dialogue, particularly racial dialogue, "is an incredibly powerful way to learn and teach…Speaking personal truths; asking tough questions; listening deeply to one another and raising, rather than avoiding, conflicts are activities seldom accomplished during a normal school day" (Landsman, 2007. p. 206). For pre-service teachers, who will be entering classrooms where strong communication skills will be crucial, Gay emphasized that skills in racial dialogue

> … are necessary for two obvious reasons. First, effective communication is the heart of teaching. Second, communication is strongly influenced by culture. Students from different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds talk, write, think

and listen in ways that are different from school patterns and expectations (Gay, 2000, p. 6).

College classroom discussions can sometimes mirror the dynamic of discussions outside the academy. That is to say, racial blunders and racist statements can be expected in the classroom as well. Whether intentional or not, these sentiments, or fear of expressing these sentiments out loud, have the capacity to inhibit attempts at true dialogue.

Although advocates support the need for discussions about race, young, pre-service teachers may be unsure and conflicted about the necessity and value of these discussions.

Classroom Avoidance

While complex and in-depth discourse may be the ideal of researchers, Bolgatz noted the reality of discussions about race in the classroom.

> Classroom conversations about race and racism can be difficult. Often teachers and students – sometimes apologetically, sometimes angrily, but mostly unselfconsciously- avoid the topics altogether. When they do take place, conversations frequently remain superficial or simplistic…We need to be able to talk meaningfully about race and racism … able to talk with people in order to understand and address racially loaded controversies (Boltgatz, 2005, p. 1).

Blum used a class he taught to conduct research on racial discussions in the college classroom. Entitled "Race and Racism," this was a graduate level course and truly diverse in its student make-up. He wrote that the experience showed him that "students of all races are hungering to be heard, to listen to others and to have honest conversations about race and racism" (Blum, 1998, p. 27). Yet he also noticed several ways students managed to resist conversations about race that attempted to move beyond the superficial. The first type of reaction occurred when a debate ensued after reading Audrey Smedley's work on the origins of race. Smedley debated the idea of race as a viable social or scientific

construct. Students would seize upon these theories and try to intellectualize any future

discussion "becoming so enamored…that they tended to lose sight of the social realities"

of race (Blum, 1998, p. 28). This tactic was a safer outlet for discussion than one on a

more personal level. Next, when students were presented with literature from people of

color, such as James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time, they began expressing frustration

because there no blueprint for "what to do about the injustices" presented in works such

as these. Not comfortable enough to verbally delve deeper into the realities of race and

racism via classroom discussion, some students were eager to take some form of action

without fully understanding the complexities of race. Finally, he noticed that when

presented with concepts such as white privilege, a few white students

> … actively accepted the idea ... Yet copping to white privilege in an interracial
> classroom can have an unproductive dynamic – a way for white students to show
> how politically advanced she or he is, without necessarily having to do anything
> about it (Blum, 1998. p. 29-30).

These and other ways of resistance point to the same types of discomfort noted by whites

outside the classroom.

This chapter has explored the ideas of selected researchers on the relevance of

race in the 21st century, how whites generally attempt to discuss race in the public sphere

and the challenges of conducting racial dialogue in higher educational settings. The ideas

of racial relevance and attempts at racial dialogue are complex as there are paradoxical

realities to be found. While great strides have been made by people of color in virtually

all sectors of American society, overt acts of racism continue to be perpetrated. Political

correctness has managed to suppress overt racist speech in some arenas, but it has also

fueled resentment in some circles and has contributed to an atmosphere of fear of

initiating or participating in virtually any form of racial dialogue. The challenges that the

general public seem to have with racial dialogue, is reflected in higher education

classrooms as well. This research project will provide an opportunity to explore these

very ideas with a selected group of student participants.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using qualitative methods. Qualitative researcher

Jennifer Mason noted that qualitative methods are generally "concerned with how the

social world is interpreted, understood, (or) experienced" (Mason, 2002, p. 3). The focus

of this study is illustrative of Mason's concept for the use of qualitative methods. This

study seeks to understand the experiences of pre-service teachers with race and racial

discourse. Expanding on the use of qualitative methodology, Strauss noted that

> Some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of
> research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons'
> experiences … Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what
> lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known (Strauss, 1990, p. 19).

While there are a number of approaches for conducting qualitative research, ethnographic

methods were chosen for this study. Glesne and Peshkin, both scholars of ethnography,

define this method of research as "immersion in the field in which the researcher collects

data primarily by participant-observation and interviewing (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p.

10).

Interviewing participants within small focus groups was used to collect data for

this study. Eleven questions were asked of the participants. These interview questions

were designed to be semi-structured; that is, allowances were made for any impromptu

follow-up questions as warranted (see Appendix). Krueger characterized focus groups as

"a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of

interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger, 1994, p. 6). Litoselliti

also emphasized the importance of comfort for participants in a focus group, so that

participants "do not feel pressurized to make decisions or reach consensus, and are

encouraged to express different points of view" (Litoselliti, 2003, p. 1-2). Given the topic of this research, it was essential to choose a method for exploration that would encourage self-reflection, without fear of judgment or embarrassment. Although focus groups typically consist of between six and ten participants, this study was designed so that no more than 5 participants would form a group. The small size was determined for ease of discussion for the participants and supports Litoselliti's belief that "smaller groups are more appropriate if the aim is to explore complex, controversial, emotional topics … " (Litoselliti, 2003. p. 3).

Challenges and Risks

On the nature of qualitative research, Glesne and Peshkin noted a distinction between "traditional qualitative research" and "postmodern ethnography" as being "particularly concerned with issues of 'inter-subjectivity,' that is, how researcher and researched affect each other" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992. p. 10). In the case of this study, pre-service teachers were asked to offer reflections on their experiences with race in general and racial dialogue in particular, while the researcher attempted to interpret this information for implications in teacher education (Creswell, 1998, p. 65). Inter-subjectivity was of particular concern, given the race of the researcher (African-American) and the European-American race of all of the pre-service teachers interviewed. Because race can still be such a volatile and sensitive topic in American society, discomfort is sometimes felt by young, white students who may have had little personal interaction with African-Americans. If not handled skillfully, this discomfort could have led to reliance on 'politically correct' responses and would have been detrimental to achieving the level of trust and openness necessary for a meaningful study.

The role of the researcher is critical here and is discussed more fully in a section to follow.

At the same time, the challenge of exploring race and racial discourse presented an advantage for the participants. Since these are students who will go on to enroll in a multicultural education course at some point before they graduate, participating in these focus groups offered them an opportunity to reflect on and address issues of race before they were required to do so for grades. These students had little to lose by being forthcoming with their feelings.

Overall, this study posed minimal risk to participants. Students who participated were not asked to perform any activities alien to typical higher education seminar classes. They were asked to critically examine and discuss their experiences with race and racial dialogue and to consider how these experiences might pertain to their future students. The remainder of this chapter will describe the importance of the researcher's role in this particular kind of study, prior studies and interviews conducted as a precursor to this study. The research setting, general descriptions of the research participants and methods of data analysis will be included.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher while conducting focus group interviews may seem deceptively benign. On the surface, it may appear that there is the simple act of questioning participants and recording their responses for later analysis. Yet in the case of any focus group, but particularly one with a subject matter that is quite sensitive, the role of the researcher is critical. In this case, the researcher must perform a delicate balancing act of being researcher and facilitator/moderator, ensuring that pre-determined questions

are asked and answered, as well as encouraging openness and fluidity of conversation.

Barker and Brooks declared the management of these numerous tasks as almost

"impossible." These researchers determined that ideally.

> The focus group should be focused, yet casual, moderated by the researcher who
> guides but does not lead, controls but does not inhibit the conversation and who
> (among other things) ensures everyone has equal opportunity to express their
> natural vocabulary; in short, the researcher is a perfect combination of
> understanding, empathy and disciplined detachment, while the respondents are
> orderly, natural, interactive and utterly self revealing (Barker and Brooks, 1998, p.
> 24).

Litoselliti summarized the duties of the researcher/facilitator/moderator as "maintaining

the focus of the discussion, to guide, stimulate and facilitate the discussion and to put

participants at ease by creating an atmosphere of openness and interaction" (Litoselliti,

2003, p. 45). The size of the groups, this researcher's rather lengthy introduction of the

study and even the order of the questions asked, were all designed to help the participants

feel at ease as they explored their racial stories and experiences.

As an African-American researcher with extensive experience in the field of

diversity, I am acutely aware of the challenges of conducting a study such as this,

particularly when the participants and researcher are racially different. In this case, the

topics of race, diversity and multicultural education are all a continuation of my academic

and professional life. For three years, I taught the required multicultural education course

that the participants would later take. For many years, I also facilitated the research

institution's Diversity Dialogue groups. These were sessions which brought the academic

and town community together to discuss issues of difference in a facilitated setting. In

addition, I served as a director of a multicultural affairs office at a small, liberal arts

college for many years. These experiences were brought to the participants in the focus groups and helped to create an environment that encouraged inquiry and reflection.

Racial dialogue is unpredictable when the discussants are of the same race. In this study where all participants were relatively young and white, additional time was taken to carefully foster an atmosphere of trust and safety. None of the participants had ever been interviewed by a person of color on the topic of race. None of the participants knew ahead of time that the race of the interviewer would be different from themselves. Given the racial make-up of the research site, it would be safe to guess that the participants may have never considered the race of the interviewer prior to arriving for their focus groups. As the focus group continued and the participants visibly relaxed, several of them spoke of their surprise and discomfort once they realized the race of the researcher (see Findings chapter). Conducting the pilot study, in-class interviews and the actual research project, reinforced this researcher's belief in the critical necessity of establishing rapport and a sense of safety for participants .While the issue of creating 'safe space' for dialogue is controversial in the field of diversity work, it is this researcher's position that without establishing a sense of trust, attempts at substantive dialogue may be endangered and cannot be effectively conducted.

Prior Studies

Three studies were conducted prior to the actual research study. A pilot focus group was interviewed and two in-class interviews were conducted.

Pilot Focus Group

This pilot focus group followed the actual study design, but was conducted at a small, liberal arts college located in a neighboring state. Five students were interviewed

and their responses were audio recorded and transcribed, both on-site and after the pilot focus group was completed. The racial make-up and relative age of this pilot group simulated the demographics of the actual study. There were three white females and two white male students in the pilot focus group. All were undergraduate in terms of their academic program and none had enrolled in their institution's required multicultural education course. Two of the participants planned to continue their post-secondary education by entering graduate school. Three planned to go directly to secondary schools to teach. Three were involved in extracurricular activities, primarily sports related. Each participant chose to use a pseudonym for the interview. These interviews were conducted over a 2.5 hour period of time.

The purpose of the pilot study was to gain clarity and insight about the questions chosen for the project as well as to explore participants' comfort level in a focus group with an interviewer of a different race. This pilot study also aimed to determine if the focus group questions would elicit thoughtful and reflective responses from the participants. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked the participants for suggestions on ways the focus group might be improved. Their suggestions were broad (e.g. be more explicit when discussing terms like diversity) and were incorporated into the actual study.

The first part of the interview questions explored the participants' backgrounds prior to entering college. Three of the participants came from very similar economic and cultural backgrounds. middle to upper middle class, white, suburban, two parent homes. Two of the participants came from very small, rural areas. Of those from the suburbs, only one reported living around and going to school with people who were racially

different from herself. This participant was actually adopted into a family of ten African-Americans (two parents, eight children). The rural students did not experience any racial diversity before college.

The next series of questions were designed to explore the participants' racial experiences and their comfort level during these experiences. The adopted participant naturally had more racial experiences than the others. She also reported having a gay African-American male as a "life-long" best friend with whom many discussions of race had taken place over the years. She expressed extreme comfort with her best friend but also with other students who were of different races. One male participant spent the summer in a close-in suburb of Chicago conducting research. As a result he was, for the first time in his life, exposed to and consistently interacted with other students who were racially different from himself. Although he initially reported a sense of comfort, he later noted his concern for self-censorship in an effort to "not make any statements that might be misunderstood as racial stereotypes." He found himself acutely aware of being "in mixed company" and did not want to offend his new friends. He claimed that this effort at racial sensitivity was not burdensome in any way, just "something I wanted to be mindful of." The only other participant who reported any direct experiences with someone racially different stated that her "best friend was bi-racial; Mexican and American I think." She stated a great deal of comfort with her friend, but noted that over time they no longer kept in contact.

Questions were posed concerning their attitudes toward race and where these attitudes may have stemmed. The participants all reported that their family life and early schooling helped shape any attitudes they held on race. Of those who had direct

experiences with diverse people, they spoke of families who explicitly taught them to "treat everyone alike" or that "all folks are pretty much the same; we all want the same things." When prompted for further explanation of what those "same things" might be, the participant responded, "You know, to earn a good living, live in a good area. One that is not run-down or ghetto, with no fear of violence." One female participant (rural area, never experienced diversity before college) reported that while "I'm comfortable with everyone," she confessed that "black men at bars really make me uncomfortable." After some thought she noted that "actually all men in bars make me uncomfortable, especially when they're in large groups." When pressed for the genesis of her concern about black men she might see in bars, she revealed that prior to college she

> never knew any black men or anything about them back home, except what I saw on television. They're always being shown as violent or lazy or they're being led away in handcuffs or wanted for some crime or something.

She reflected that between her early media exposure and opinions from family members, she grew to distrust men in general, but black men in particular.

Participants were asked if they had any knowledge of concepts such as 'white privilege' or "white identity development," personal vs. institutional racism. Every participant responded that yes, they all knew about the concept of white privilege and all offered definitions, characterizations and examples of how they may be products of this privilege. One participant thought she "heard about it on t.v. or somewhere." None of the participants were aware of racial identity development theories. On the issue of institutional racism, one participant responded "An example would be Affirmative Action. It's a large group making decisions for everybody based on race." Personal

racism was agreed by the group to be a "person making a decision based on race, but also your thoughts about other people."

Finally the group was asked to discuss any concerns they had about teaching diverse students in the future. In this instance, they all candidly expressed different concerns. One participant noted she "was more concerned about my students' parents." She recalled a friend who is a teacher who experienced very angry parents meeting with her about her making an 'unintended racial slur' to their 3rd grade child. This participant wanted to avoid the same scenario in her career. A male participant who planned to teach at the university level was more concerned about whether diverse students would "fit in." After some thought he acknowledged these feelings.

> If a student was taken off the street, if they were 'more ghetto' and they were in the classroom with you – even with intelligence and knowledge – it would bother me for them to be in my classroom. I just don't like that whole culture, that whole style. That whole lower economic culture. The ebonics, that language. They may not be disruptive, but I just don't want to have to deal with all that.

Another participant wondered if her classroom turned out to be very (racially) different from her, "they may not respect me." Yet another wondered "Can I even relate to them if they are so different from me?" The last participant wondered aloud if they (members of the focus groups) were holding "misconceptions about students we haven't even met, based on looks?" She continued that her concern was how "to open folks up to talk about race and look past differences and recognize similarities. To know that race doesn't matter and that kids are kids."

At the conclusion of the pilot focus group, the participants were asked to offer suggestions on improving the questions asked or how the interview was conducted. While none had suggestions about the manner in which the interview was conducted,

several suggested that I be more explicit about "What diversity are you talking about? We focused on black and white issues." They seemed to feel as if their discussion centered too exclusively on black-white relations, although there is nothing in the questions that imply or directly address black-white issues. They wanted to know "how does diversity relate to others?" and that I should "be more specific about different groups." The researcher then pointed out that the questions were completely neutral and that their discussion took shape around black-white issues. When asked if that might be a function of the researcher's race, two participants asserted this "had nothing to do with it." One participant thought that it "quite possibly" could have affected the discussion in that way. The other two participants had no comment. The concerns for a more explicit explanation of diversity were noted and were incorporated in the introduction given at the beginning of each focus group.

In the beginning of the pilot focus group, most participants expressed relative comfort in their interactions with diverse people. Yet when asked about their concerns for their future classrooms, more candid responses were offered. These responses ranged from outright prejudice and stereotyping of an entire race to concerns of being prepared to offer the best to their future students. Between this dichotomy was anxiety about the skills to recognize and address issues that may be racial in character. The frank nature of the responses to this question may be a function of a developed comfort level with the researcher since the question was posed at the end of the two and a half hour interview. The pilot focus group clearly appeared more comfortable toward the end of the interviews and offered much more thoughtful responses.

The researcher learned several things at the conclusion of the pilot study. First, it is crucial to allow time for participants to get to know each other a little, but more importantly allowed time to get a sense of the researcher. It was noted that several of the participants asked questions of the researchers' educational background, professional position, etc. While some may view the questioning of credentials as insensitive at best and possibly racist at worse, the role of the researcher at this point is not to second-guess motives of participants. The mission of the researcher is to set the stage to conduct an honest and reflective focus group. It was crucial to stay focused on the task at hand.

Next, family was revealed to be a primary influence on the perspectives of the participants, followed by television or other forms of the media. While family provided the essential and primary views on race (e.g. people should all be treated the same), television seemed to provide negative stereotypes to the participants. As they spoke of negative beliefs about men of color, for example, television was stated as the source of their information.

This researcher was surprised to learn that participants had strong feelings about the intersection of economic class and race. Several students illustrated their disdain for "ghetto students" or those from lower socio-economic classes as potential challenges for them. Although the participants had some struggles with issues of race, they were clear that they would not tolerate any behavior they attributed to being 'low-class.' Here again, there perceptions of what constituted 'ghetto' behavior were gleaned primarily from television.

In-Class Interviews

The researcher also conducted two in-class interviews, held at the institution where the actual study was conducted. The in-class interviews were conducted with students who were enrolled in the required multicultural education course for pre-service teachers, but with students who did not participate in the actual study. The in-class interviews were conducted at the beginning of the semester; students were in the very early stages of exposure to this multicultural education course. The purpose of the class interviews was threefold. 1) to offer students an 'in-person' insight into the experiences/challenges/rewards facing a person of color, particularly in a predominantly white higher education institution; 2) introduce them to the topic of this research and to discuss their personal experiences (or lack thereof) with a person who is racially different from themselves and 3) to ask for their insight into ways this study might be approached to be the most useful. This researcher spent about an hour in discussion with students, sharing experiences and coaxing them to share their reflections with me. Considerable time was spent assuring them that "I don't offend easily" and after directly discussing my race and the whole concept of political correctness, several students seemed to relax and became more open with their responses.

On the surface, the demographic makeup of these two classes seemed characteristic of most sections of the course. mostly female, young (low-mid twenties), white. Yet when the students shared their stories, it became apparent that their experiences varied widely and that some of their racial experiences were actually quite extensive. Several of these students had traveled widely, both domestically and internationally; some had dated members of other races; one had the experience of

growing up with an adopted African-American male. Other students spoke of having very little interaction with people who were racially different from themselves and stated that often their ideas, particularly about African-Americans, were gleaned from the media. Some students admitted that the portrayals of African-Americans they were exposed to were overwhelmingly negative. e.g. black men as violent, black women as sexually promiscuous, etc. Others confessed to receiving harshly negative messages from family members and some spoke of the difficulty of trying to reconcile their families' views with a nagging sense of the inappropriateness of those feelings.

The discussion then turned to ways these students felt this study could be approached that might prove most useful and meaningful. They offered many ideas and suggestions, several of which have been incorporated into the approach for this study. Finally, these students wrote a short essay, (turned in the following day), with further reflections on the topics covered during the class and a "racial autobiography."

In many ways, the in-class interviews provided information that was congruent with findings from the previously mentioned pilot study. Here again, time and care was spent setting the stage for racial dialogue. A considerable amount of time was spent providing participants with some background information about my own experiences with race. Again, there was a discernible change in the atmosphere as students relaxed and began to share their reflections. Students spoke of the strong influence of parental perspectives. Although some students spoke of parents or grandparents they described as racist, these students reported complex feelings about race. While they may have disagreed with the views of their relatives, these students also struggled with the burden of bringing dissent to family discussions. These students also spoke of the influence of

the media in shaping their perceptions of those who are racially different. Television shows depicting different races were generally helpful in expanding their views, while here again, news reports generally contributed to negative perspectives, particularly views of black men.

Unlike participants in the pilot study, the students who were a part of the in-class interviews seemed to have more exposure and experience with those who were racially different. Interracial dating and interracial friendships were more prevalent with this group than with students in the pilot study. This difference might be attributed to the demographic difference in institutional location. Students in the pilot study were enrolled in an institution with a much smaller population of under-represented students than those at the research site.

The generosity and honesty of all the students in the pilot focus study and the those who participated in the two classroom interviews helped tremendously in further shaping the blueprint and methodology for this study.

Research setting for this study

The site for this project was a large, Midwestern university with a College of Education which requires pre-service teachers to take a multicultural education course for certification. The multicultural education course seeks to prepare pre-service teachers for what Gay calls, "the instructional challenges of (teaching) ethnically, racially, socially and linguistically diverse students in the 21st century" (Gay, 2000, p. 1). Participants were asked to be part of a focus group consisting of up to five students each, lasting approximately 3 hours for each group. During the focus group, participants were asked to reflect on and discuss the questions listed in the Purpose of the Study as well as those

listed in Appendix A. The questions were designed for breadth and to prompt participants to reflect for deeper levels of meaning. The sessions were recorded via audio tape recorder and transcribed after the focus groups were concluded. Students were encouraged to offer any additional reflections to the researcher in written form after the focus groups concluded. These additional reflections were optional and could have been submitted to the researcher at any time during the academic year. Of the 13 students who participated, seven sent additional comments or reflections to the researcher via email.

Research participants

This study was designed for a maximum of 21 students. Although more than 100 invitations were extended, 16 students responded and offered to become focus group members. In the end, 13 students decided to actually participate in the study. The 13 students were divided into four focus groups. Once students volunteered for the project, they were contacted via e-mail or telephone call. Participants were notified that they may contact the researcher at any time to add, alter or remove their reflections from the study. Participants were also notified that they may examine their reflections at any time prior to the completion of the study. All participants were told they could choose pseudonyms.

The participant pool for the dissertation study came from an Educational Psychology and Measurement course as well as students who were in their first week of enrollment in the Human Relations for the Classroom Teacher course. This pool was chosen because these students are overwhelmingly targeting enrollment in the Teacher Education Program and plan to go on for teacher certification. A summary of the students is as follows.

Table 1 Student Participants

Name *	Academic Year	Major
Anthony	Junior	Math Education
April	Junior	Social Studies
Bonnie	Senior	Secondary English
Catherine	Sophomore	Open major
Harriet	Junior	English Education
Jack	Senior	Secondary Social Studies
Joan	Sophomore	Open major
Lacy	Senior	Music Education
Laney	Sophomore	English Education
Lisa	Sophomore	Communications/Journalism
Paul	Junior	Music Education
Sheila	Junior	Math Education
Tom	Junior	Sec. English/Religious Studies

(*All names are pseudonyms).

The group was primarily made up of juniors and seniors. All appeared to be in the early twenties, with the exception of one female student. This student was a 'non-traditional' student, in her early 40's, married with children. The pre-service teachers who participated in this project primarily grew up and lived in the Midwest, with one student originating from upstate New York. As children, ten of the participants grew up in small, rural towns within a 200 mile radius of the research site; one participant grew up in a suburb of a large city. As a child, one participant lived in numerous small towns in the southern half of the United States, spending a great deal of time in Appalachian mountain towns before his family moved to the Midwest during his high school years.

When asked how and if they would identify themselves in terms of race, ethnicity or nationality, five students stated that they were "white." Five other students identified themselves by their ancestry; of those participants, German and Irish lineage dominated. Three students identified themselves as "American."

As for their future plans upon graduation, seven of the participants planned to begin their teaching careers immediately after their undergraduate degrees were completed. The remaining six had plans to enroll in graduate school; one planned to pursue a Ph.D with the goal of teaching at the post-secondary level. Eight student participants expressed a desire to return to small towns, but close enough to family so they might drive for visits. Four students expressed a desire to teach in Chicago or New York. One student hoped to move to Colorado, "my dream" (Lacy).

Data collection process

The setting for the 4 focus groups was a small conference room located in the participants' College of Education. Signed consent forms were collected at the beginning of each focus group session and time was given for participants to ask any initial questions. An audio recorder was placed in the middle of the conference table for ease of use. The researcher also used a laptop for on-site transcription of each focus group. This functioned as a back-up in case the audio recording equipment malfunctioned.

An explanation of the process of the focus group was offered to each group as well as a general discussion about the genesis and nature of the study. A short anecdote concerning the researcher's own experience with a particular racial incident (found at the beginning of this study) was read to the participants. This story was intended to be amusing and to help put participants at ease. As suggested by members who participated

in the pilot group and in-class interviews, a careful explanation of terms, such as 'race,'

was also included in this preliminary discussion. The researcher suggested that the

participants consider race "beyond black and white" and to include their experiences with

members of all races in their reflections. Some time was spent talking about the

importance of their responses and encouraging each participant to be as honest as

possible. The researcher repeatedly assured the participants that "I don't offend easily"

and it was important to not be concerned about political correctness in this context.

Litoselliti calls this the "forming stage" of focus group discussions. She noted that

typically,

> …participants do not know each other and do not feel part of the group yet, but are gathering impressions about others; here we get formalities and politeness, rather than trust among group members…It is crucial at this stage that the moderator creates a relaxed and friendly atmosphere (and) brings energy to the session (Litoselliti, 2003. p. 72).

Although focus groups can be unpredictable, each focus group session was fairly

similar in tone and process (Litoselliti, 2003. p. 72). Questions were posed and answered,

with follow-up questions for the participants for expansion or clarification. Participants

tended to be a little reserved and appeared somewhat anxious or cautious at the onset. Yet

about halfway through the process, each group seemed to relax and open up more with

their responses.

Data Analysis

Noted qualitative researcher John W. Creswell, describes ethnographic analysis as

"a spiral" beginning with the organization of collected data (in this case transcripts of the

focus groups) into categories (Creswell, 1998. p. 35). For this study, typed notes taken

during the focus groups were examined and corrected for error. Audio tapes were then transcribed and blended with the typed transcripts for complete quotations.

After an initial read-through of the transcribed transcript, the process of manual coding was used to categorize information into themes for analysis and interpretation. Manual coding has been primarily described as identifying and placing emerging themes and ideas into groups for use in the study. Key ideas which directly relate to the research questions will become prominent with the participants' direct words used to illustrate key ideas (Litoselliti, 2003; Cresswell, 1998; Strauss, 1990). From these categories, the study developed into a descriptive, detailed narrative. Guided by the purpose and objectives of the study, the researcher interpreted and analyzed the data in an effort to determine meanings and implications for multicultural educational policy, practice and pedagogy.

Concluding Statement

This study was helped tremendously by the prepatory work conducted. The class interviews and the pilot study helped to prepare this researcher with questions that were more focused, yet broad enough to allow for elucidation by the participants. It became clear with these early studies, that the time spent putting students at ease for a conversation on race with a researcher of a different race, was time well spent. This was evident by the candor of some of the comments and reflections made by the participants. All the students who took the time to discuss their experiences with this researcher seemed to offer polite, socially acceptable answers at the onset of our interaction. After rapport was established and students seemed to trust the researcher's intentions (not to embarrass or blame), students relaxed and offered much more candid responses. Mindful of the sensitivity, potential discomfort and a tendency toward politically-correct answers

to a researcher of a different race, this researcher saw clearly the benefit of creating a sense of openness and trust with the participants.

Finally, analysis and interpretation of the experiences and feelings of all the students who participated in this work was helped tremendously by the particular perspective this researcher brought to this study. Having the experience of instructing pre-service teachers in a multicultural education course where the issue of race was a focal point, provided the researcher with a unique level of understanding and insight into the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH FINDINGS

This project sought to explore the experiences and views of contemporary white

pre-service teachers on issues of race and racial dialogue. The study analyzed the views

of 13 participants via small focus groups. Although the participants were divided for ease

of management, their views were not compared or contrasted in any way. They were

treated, for all intents and purposes, as one large group. These focus groups were

recorded and the participant responses were transcribed. Their commentaries are arranged

by themes found common to the participants. The participants will collectively be

referred to as either "students," "participants," "student participants," or "pre-service

teachers."

Questions posed to the groups included those concerning their childhood

memories as well as adult experiences. Participants were asked to consider influences on

their attitudes and beliefs prior to enrolling in their multicultural courses. They were also

asked to consider possible challenges as future teachers in diverse classrooms.

This chapter is arranged in four sections. The organization of this chapter is

designed to present the complex mix of challenges facing the pre-service teachers.

Broadly, the chapter will illustrate what the students know about race, how they talk

about race, what has been instrumental in developing the racial perspectives they hold

and how they envision their future as teachers.

More specifically, the first section, General Racial Knowledge and Attitudes, will

offer an overview of the participants' knowledge and attitudes about race. The interviews

show that the participants have a limited conceptualization of race beyond skin color and

heritage. Their general attitudes about race and racism are a complicated mixture of

acceptance of other people as well as feelings of prejudice; denial and frustration about racism's existence intertwined with the acknowledgement of internal struggles with their own bigotry.

The second section, Talking About Race, is designed to gain an understanding of how our student participants engage in racial dialogue. This segment reveals a general reluctance to engage in talk about issues of race for fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Feeling restricted by and resentful of the atmosphere of political correctness, most participants lacked experience with meaningful racial dialogue. While most student participants talked about race superficially, a few experienced distinct exceptions that involved them in meaningful conversations about race.

Section three, Key Influences on Their Perspectives, reveals major factors which helped to shape the attitudes of the participants. Based on the interviews, the early impact of family attitudes as well as ideas gleaned from early media experiences, continued to have an impact on their perspectives as young adults in college. Less important, but still significant, were childhood and young adult relationships formed outside the family.

Finally section four, Hope Endures, describes the optimism the participants hold about their role as teachers and the positive impact they hope to have on their future students. Despite the mix of emotions from confusion to frustration about issues of race, the participants remained determined to provide the best leadership possible for their diverse classrooms.

General Racial Knowledge And Attitudes

This section of the interview gave student participants an opportunity to discuss their general knowledge about concepts of race as well as their attitudes about race and

racial issues. Generally speaking, the participants did not have extensive knowledge about race and its historic impact on American society and even less of an awareness about the growing study of race itself. Concepts such as racial identity development theories and the study of white privilege held little or no meaning for most of them. Several of the students expressed resentment at their limited knowledge, fearing their naiveté will cause them to be misunderstood.

Students spoke of their frustration about the attention that racial issues provoked, particularly by the media. Concerned with media overkill, some participants seemed to think that racism was no longer a major issue in the 21st century and suspected that continued focus on the subject would be a step backward in terms of racial progress. While most of the participants seemed to have a strong sense of morality about racism, they acknowledged occasional struggle with their own internal prejudice as well as how to respond to the overt bigotry of others.

This complexity set the tone for the remainder of the focus group interviews. The participants wrestled with a form of racial paradox, where ideals of 'right' co-existed with feelings they themselves would characterize as 'wrong' and resentment lived alongside good will.

Race in Black and White

There was an immediate theme that surfaced early in the interviews. Student participants seemed to focus the vast majority of their comments on interactions between black and white people. After the initial introductions by this researcher and between the participants, time was allotted for information detailing the purpose of the study, along with guidelines for the process of the interviews within the focus groups. An extended

discussion was initiated by this researcher on the definition of terms such as 'race,' 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism.' The participants were encouraged numerous times to include all racial designations in their responses, if those categories applied to their experience or knowledge. The intent for this discussion was to encourage an expanded view of these terms as the students considered their responses to questions. This idea was suggested by a number of participants in the pilot study and in-class interviews. As the student participants struggled with memories of prejudice, bigotry or indifference, their comments indicated that their most prominent ideas about race involved African-Americans and white people. Although some participants had childhood memories of communities with a few people from different countries, they were mentioned as peripheral figures. One participant who grew up and lived in the city of the research site, did acknowledge the presence of other races but only as it pertained to the current demographic changes in her city.

> This city is way more diverse now than when I was growing up. Because of the University, we have a lot of people in town from different countries. When I was growing up, there were just a few kids from different places, also a few black kids. Although this town is still mostly white, there are a lot of people here now. I see lots of Mexicans now, too. (Sheila).

The participants' singular focus on racial issues between blacks and whites might point to differences that were most salient for them. Perhaps incidents between blacks and whites remain uppermost in the participants' minds because of physical contrasts. In other words, it could simply be that because people of African and European ancestry are so visually different, any experiences between the two groups stand out in the participants' childhood memories. It is also possible that the student participants were

influenced by the race of this researcher and their decision to include other races in their discussion faded into the background.

Defining Race and Racial Identity

It was informative to understand if these student participants shared a relatively common language or common knowledge of concepts as the focus groups got underway. Race is a complex topic, made more so by bringing together people with multiple perspectives and experiences. Given the work of demographers on Millennials' wider exposure and connectivity, this question was designed to be a gauge for the students' level of exposure to racial concepts prior to their multicultural education course.

When asked how they would define or characterize race or racism, the participants seemed to fairly agree on the concept of race. it is about heritage or skin color.

> Honestly, the first thing is color. That's how I've been taught. That it's about color. (Tom).

> When I hear the word race, I think of what our background is. For example, I am white, Caucasian. That's what I would check whenever I fill out forms. (Laney).

> I think race is about our ancestors and where they all come from and your heritage. (Joan).

The concept of racism, however, proved to be personal as it brought the students to memories of their families, a theme they would revisit throughout their focus groups. A representative response was offered by Laney who voiced her concern about her family and the pressure she felt to be understood.

> When I think of racism, I just think of ignorance. I feel embarrassed that people are so ignorant and I'm very sensitive about it. People in my family are very racist and I'm really embarrassed about it. I'm always worried that someone will immediately label me as racist before they even get to know me. Or if I've said

something, they'll think I'm racist before I can explain myself well. I think I really have a guilty conscious because of my family. (Laney).

Several student participants expressed their resentment over what they felt were unfair depictions of whites. They seem to take any discussion on racism personally and some felt discomfort at being associated with racist acts, even if these acts were historical or unintentional. These students did not want to be stereotyped in any way and sought to distance themselves from 'those people,' referring to their perception of stereotypical racists (e.g. hood wearing, cross burning, etc.). Other participants sought to dispel the notion that racism and prejudice are the sole domain of white people or that acts of racism must have protracted focus. The following two responses illustrate a defensiveness and a kind of 'race exhaustion'. Some participants said they felt tired of feeling blamed and several participants seem to push back as if to say 'enough!'

> Racism? I think it's more two-sided than people want to admit to. It's not just one group of people's ignorance. I think every group has their own ignorance or upbringing. It has a lot to do with how people were brought up. When I hang out with friends in the south, they're not bad people. They're actually smart people, but because of the way they were brought up they're just ignorant of some things. In the south, it's all about white and black. Very serious hatred down there. (Tom)

> I took a history course last year and the professor kept talking about the KKK. She kept focusing on all the bad stuff that is part of white people's history. I hated that. Why do we have to keep talking about this? Why can't we just learn about it once and move on? (Joan).

Affirmative Action was mentioned by several of the participants as they attempted to characterize race. This seemed to be a particularly volatile topic as Affirmative Action was depicted as a form of racism that victimized whites. Several students expressed resentment toward, they felt, unfair and unearned privileges given to some students simply because of their skin color.

I always think of black and white. That's what I pay more attention to. Affirmative Action also comes into my head when I think about race. I have a good friend now who is bi-racial. He got a lot of scholarships and it struck me as odd that he got more scholarships than me. People talk about it all the time in classes. (Lisa).

It seemed several students felt Affirmative Action was responsible for the enrollment of virtually any student racially different from themselves. As Harriet illustrated, this feeling goes beyond the walls of academe to the corporate world.

I worked for a large corporation and I wouldn't say this was racism, necessarily. But they were always pushing to recruit minorities or hire a minority. That would maybe be the closest thing to racism. (Harriet).

When asked, none of the students had any prior knowledge of racial identity development theories prior to taking their multicultural education course. As for the concept of white privilege, Jack was the only participant who had heard of this concept, albeit by chance. He decided to attend a lecture that was offered on campus about what he mistakenly thought was 'white power.' Raised to believe that all people were equal, he went to the lecture in anger and was prepared to be a voice of protest when he discovered his misunderstanding. Once there, he seemed to be very open to the ideas presented.

I went to this lecture last year and they were talking about white privilege. Honestly, the reason I went was that I thought the lecture was about white power and I went because I couldn't believe there would be a white power lecture at this university! I was really surprised when I found out exactly what they were talking about, how being white has advantages that are un-earned. Well my parents kind of talked about this before, they just didn't use the words 'white privilege.' But I'm really glad to see that people are talking about this and that there are now even courses being taught in this country on whiteness. That's what the lecturer told us. (Jack).

General Attitudes about Race and Racism

Now away from parental influences and living on their own in college, the student participants were in a position to independently analyze their feelings about race and

determine how they felt. Most students seemed to reject prejudice they witnessed as adolescents and may have felt in their family home. It seemed they were more than willing to try to accept people based on character or as individuals; at least that is what they wanted to believe they would do. It is compelling to note that while attempting to de-emphasize the issue of race in their social interactions, stereotypes would still occasionally manifest in their thoughts.

> I really do believe we are all the same as people and that we should be dealt with as individuals, not members of a particular race. Character! That is what is most important. Now I'm not saying that there aren't problems about racism and that they should be ignored. Ignoring it doesn't make it any better. If it weren't an issue, no one would be uncomfortable. But we're all individuals and I really do think we need to focus more on people. Who you associate with and who you develop relationships with. Categorizing people can be helpful, I suppose, but it can also be very destructive. (April).

> Now that I'm an adult, I just think that racism is lousy! People should be judged for who they are and not what they are. I would not have a problem with one of my kids if they wanted to date someone who wasn't white. My dad certainly would! He's of a completely different generation though. Some of his experiences have made him the way he is. But I'm guilty too. When I hear that somebody robbed a gas station, or something, I wonder if he was black. Instead of asking other questions, the first thing I wonder or ask, is was he black. I'd like to say I don't do this, but shoot, I do! (Bonnie).

A number of students expressed frustration at the emphasis (some felt continuously) afforded to race. They expressed concern that continued attention would be detrimental to social interactions and would focus too much on negativity; too much of what separates us and not enough on personal similarities and common ground. At the beginning of the focus groups, none of the participants seemed to feel that consistently and directly confronting racial issues directly would lead to lessoning racial strife.

> Since living here, I've learned that regardless of background or race, the only thing to look at is are they intelligent, willing to learn, open? Why can't we just put race aside and have more of a relationship? Just live and let live. I had a black boss who was from the south. This was my first time having a superior of a

different color. It was really eye-opening. He was very open and would tell us stories about his time in the military. His immediate boss was a very rough white guy, but somehow they got along beautifully. They seemed to focus on the work and not on their differences. Why can't we all just do that? (Sheila).

I really do think we dwell on it way too much. We need to teach about it, about our different cultures, but I think if we continue to dwell on it, it will just make the situation worse than it already is. I think we need to teach about other cultures and races, and not just about white people. But I just believe there is a negativity that can be avoided. (Paul).

Racism is Over, Isn't It?

A number of participants thought racism died with the civil rights movement. Once they learned about the conditions that existed for people of color when their parents and grandparents were growing up and the subsequent protests and push for equality that ensued, many students assumed that racism was a thing of the past. They tended to perceive racism in an almost grandiose way. masses of people parading in hoods; people hanging from trees; hordes of angry white people blocking school steps. Because they have not witnessed this kind of overt racism on a regular basis, the participants spoke of their surprise and confusion as they have become exposed to continuing racial issues as young adults in college.

My parents made sure that I knew about the civil rights movement and people working for justice for everyone. They were part of that movement once they moved away from their parents. A lot of their friends were part of that movement and I used to hear them talk about the marches, the cross-burnings, the hangings. So none of this was new to me. But when I came to college and began to learn more about what black people are still struggling with, I was shocked! I thought racism was over. I thought things had gotten better. I guess they have for a few people, but not for everybody. (Jack).

I worked at a domestic violence shelter for women and children for a little while. While I worked at this job, I had a lot of interaction with African-American women and children. At this shelter, race did not play a role in how we viewed or treated the women and children. My boss was an African-American woman and we had another co-worker who was African-American. I felt very comfortable around them. But they taught me a lot about the injustices that still exist, things

they still have to deal with. The thing I liked about them, is they didn't just tell me stories. They had research that they used for the shelter and they exposed me to that. I was blown away! To me as a white woman, it looks like things are so much better. But my boss showed me how far we still have to go before things are close to equal. I thought racism was dead. (Catherine).

I took a literature class that had a lot of books by African and African-American writers. This class was fantastic, because the novels we read were historical fiction. I ended up learning so much about their history and their struggles. We didn't just talk about the literature. He related the literature to things that are still happening in the world today. We talked about the prison systems, the levels of poverty for black folks vs. everyone else. Man, I didn't have a clue about how things still were. I came to college knowing a little bit about the civil rights movement. I thought racism was pretty much dead except for a few idiots out there. The more I learn, the more I'm amazed at how much I don't know. (Anthony).

Feeling Unprepared for the World

A number of participants complained about the lack of knowledge they received while in junior and high school about other races. While they may not have noticed the disparity then, by the time they reached college and were being exposed to other races, many expressed that they felt "cheated" by their early education (Lacy). The participants recalled their early school years as being one-sided in terms of what they learned and who they learned about, with very few exceptions. Their primary and secondary education mirrored that of most American students. education with a decidedly white, male slant. Most of the participants recalled only learning about Dr. Martin Luther King around his birthday, but none recalled any classes where they were regularly exposed to the history, culture, literature or the arts of other races and other people. Most said they did not receive any information from home, nor did they always feel comfortable bringing questions they may have had to their families. As they took college courses and began to learn more about others, and particularly as they began to interact with racially

different people, several expressed anger at how naïve they felt and how much they did

not know. They felt inadequate in their knowledge and stifled in their social abilities.

> I feel completely unprepared to even know how to interact with black people. I don't know anything about their history other than a few people like Dr. King. Because I don't know stuff, I'm always afraid I'm going to say something that really shows how ignorant I feel. (Lacy).

> That literature class that I told you I took? That class and that professor really opened my eyes to what was still going on in the world. But you know, I found myself angry so many times because of all the stuff I didn't learn in high school! Why haven't I been taught this stuff? People were always bragging about how special and wonderful our school system was, but I realize now I didn't learn much to prepare me for the world. On one side, I hear all this negative stuff about other people, and then I start reading books by black authors and I'm just blown away. I can't even begin to talk to anyone back home about all the stuff I've learned. They would call me names and laugh at me and my grandfather would be so angry, he would probably curse me out! So I never mention any of this. (Anthony).

Internal Prejudice

A question was posed about any internal struggles with feelings of prejudice or

bigotry the participants may have harbored. Fueled by media images and family

influences, several students admitted having conflicting feelings about those who were

racially different from themselves. They struggled with making sense of perspectives that

could be characterized as stereotypical juxtaposed with knowledge they were gaining

about racial inequities. They did not want to fall prey to external influences that might

lead them toward prejudice, yet they found themselves at times experiencing these very

feelings when faced with particular situations. Their feelings were a complex mixture of

fear, guilt, prejudice and attempts at understanding.

> Racial minorities such as African-Americans I think threaten people. I think as a racial minority, they make others feel uncomfortable because of all the stereotypes out there about them. I know there are more problems associated with racial minorities due to lack of opportunities, socioeconomic status and prejudice. But I still feel threatened a lot of times. By the men and the women. I guess I just

need more opportunities to spend time with racial minorities in order to get rid of my prejudices. (Sheila).

The stereotypical traits of African-Americans are that they are loud, lazy, outspoken and talk with a dialect. I have seen some of these traits, but it does not make me believe that they apply to all African-Americans. Although I have caught myself thinking about this when I've been watching low-class African-Americans. But here's the thing. I think it is sad that I have to *try* not to apply stereotypes because they are what automatically comes to my mind. I *want* to view people for who they are and not judge them because of what race they are. (Laney, emphasis hers).

Some of the stereotypes that were ingrained in my mind still remain. I would like to think that I have no racist feelings towards blacks. But, I know that if I were placed in a situation in which I was the minority around African-Americans, I would feel uncomfortable. Most African-Americans that I meet, seem to be very similar to myself. But I don't meet the type of people that I see on the news. I know that it is wrong to believe that either group of people could be representative of the entire African-American population. I believe that this country has come a long way in racism against blacks. But looking at my own views, which I used to think were not racist, I realize that we still do have a long way to go to eliminate racism. (Joan).

One student seemed to feel that lack of opportunities to actually meet people who were racially different helped to fuel her prejudice. While this student recognized her stereotypical thinking, it is interesting to note that she placed the responsibility for her feelings solely on her academic institution, e.g. 'if we had more minorities, I would not have these prejudices.' She acknowledged that her feelings may be inappropriate, yet was not prepared to 'own' them.

It's hard to deal with my stereotypes and prejudice because I don't have many opportunities to get to really know anyone other than other white students. The minority population here on campus is really small, so the campus is still mostly white. If we have any interactions at all, it's mostly with athletes or you assume that they're athletes. If you see a black man or woman on campus, the first thing that runs through your mind is that they must play sports. That is a terrible stereotype but because the numbers are so limited, it is just the way people think. (Lisa).

Another student freely admitted his prejudice and seemed to feel justified in doing so. His feelings about black men and Mexicans were based on the negative images portrayed in the media and his limited experience with observing those who seemed to fit those negative images in real life. He did not seem to recognize the folly of accepting a small minority of people as representative of an entire population or the fact that his ideas were fueled by unbalanced and negative media portrayals.

> I'll admit right now that I believe what I see about blacks on television. I see it happening – live – in the town where I'm from and here (in the town where the university is located). On television you see black men committing crimes and getting busted and you see Mexicans coming to this country in droves and taking jobs and putting their kids in our schools. That's what I see in my town! Here I see black men, if they're not athletes at this university, they are out drinking and smoking weed. They make all these babies and leave them. I may have tried to not buy into what I see on television if it weren't for the fact that I see that kind of crap all the time! So when is it a stereotype? Or when is it just a fact of life? (Tom).

The students reflected on their statements and were allowed time (silence) if they chose to continue. For most of the focus groups, this seemed to be a particularly uncomfortable point in the discussion. Almost every participant, after talking about their struggle with prejudice and stereotype, expressed regret about their feelings. They spoke about how they 'should not feel this way' or that 'I know this is stupid, but … ' While they expressed discomfort with their feelings, they also seemed unable to move beyond them.

External Prejudice

Student participants also seemed to struggle with incidents that they witnessed or had some involvement. They felt conflicted about whether they should interfere in situations where prejudice or racism were displayed; they also felt guilt when they did nothing. Students knew that there were often consequences for speaking up and speaking

out. The possible risk of being ostracized from family and friends was one that many

were not ready to risk. Sheila (the student who later stated she was "half white and half

Hispanic"), began by recalling an incident of prejudice from one African-American

woman to another.

> I have never thought of myself as being 'white' or others as being a particular
> color except in the workplace. I once had a boss who was an African-American
> woman. She treated other African-American women really bad and talked about
> them being low-class and worthless. I didn't understand this at all! I thought she
> would treat her own people better. I guess I thought that racial minorities always
> stuck together because they understood oppression and racism. I didn't know
> what to do! I didn't know what to say! I thought the way she talked about other
> women was horrible and I wanted to do something. She had me follow these
> African-American women around the store because she said they were all thieves.
> This really tripped me out and it made me sick. What should I have done about
> that? (Sheila).

Lacy recalled an incident when an African-American friend was offended by a

comment made by a professor. Lacy admitted that although she knew how upset her

friend was, she did not feel comfortable standing up to the professor to defend her friend.

She also did not feel comfortable broaching this painful event with her friend, leading

one to question the depth of their friendship. Conversations about race beyond the

superficial, even among friends, were rarely ever risked. This was the case for most of the

student participants. If offended by the actions or words of another, they often avoided

confrontation by ignoring the incident or removing themselves from the situation.

> It was weird. I just sat there and tried not to look at her face. After class, it was
> obvious how upset she was. She couldn't even look at me. I never felt
> comfortable bringing it up to her, but I did talk to other friends about it. I was
> more comfortable talking to my white friends about what happened to my black
> friend. But I couldn't talk to (my black friend) about it at all. I wish I'd said
> something to that teacher. My friend never brought it up to me. (Lacy).

> I totally disagree with so many people's actions towards blacks now. I even find
> myself looking the other way when close friends will say something disgusting or
> racist. I don't feel it's really my place to say something to a friend, but I just don't

want to be a part of it. Sometimes I'll just walk away when they start. A lot of times I just don't say anything. Sometimes they'll rag on me because they can tell by my face that I don't like it. (Anthony).

For Lisa, the courage to take a stand against bigotry exhibited by her friends has come with age and experience. She risked being ostracized and began to question their value as friends, yet she also acknowledged responsibility for her own actions.

Many of my friends in high school were really racist and prejudiced. Sometimes I argued with them but many times I just stayed quiet. When I go back home to visit, they're still there and they are still racist. Now, I'll speak up and say something when they start that crap. But I think about all the times I didn't say anything. I really regret that I never said anything. But you know what I regret just as much? How much time I wasted with these people. Why did I even continue to spend time with them? But I have to take responsibility for my own actions and my silence. I know that now. (Lisa).

Talking About Race

This section of the chapter provides insight into how the student participants engage in dialogue about race. The interviews reveal that most students lack experience with racial dialogue, either from lack of opportunity or discomfort with the subject. For those who have attempted to talk about race, they often characterized their experience as uncomfortable and cautious. They were acutely aware of the social restrictions of being politically correct, which only served to make the participants feel more anxiety about being misinterpreted. With a few exceptions, students reported that conversations about race generally remained superficial, even with close friends. Of those who did experience meaningful conversations about race, they reported feeling enthused by the dialogue and encouraged to continue their attempts. Once again, the student participants presented a complex story of a desire to foray into racial dialogue, but feeling resentful and fearful of the consequences of any verbal mis-step.

Experience with Racial Dialogue

The participants were asked if they had any experience with racial dialogue. They were instructed to consider instances of racial dialogue with people of their own race or with someone different from themselves. Here again, family influences played a role in their ability to venture into racial interactions. For one participant, his fear of ridicule and humiliation governed his ability and desire to venture into racial dialogue. His trepidation on realizing the race of this researcher at the onset of the focus group fueled his reluctance even more. Yet, he persisted and over time, became relaxed enough to share his story; not only with racial interactions while in college, but also to wrestle within himself and with his family when he returned home.

> I have a really hard time discussing race with anyone and I think it's because of my grandfather. I think deep down I'm afraid if I say something, the wrong thing, someone will talk down to me like my grandfather did. Since I've been in college, I am trying a little more, like joining this study. But I have to say, when I saw that you were African-American, I didn't feel good about it at first. I thought you might act like my grandfather. (Paul).

One student spoke of the uncertainty that many students may have felt but did not voice. uncertainty of the concept of race and how it actually might impact her life. In this student's case, she had to determine what race meant to her in general as well as what it meant for her personally as a bi-racial woman. Even with her racial background, Sheila spoke of her inexperience with interactions with those who were racially different. This lack of experience even within a community of color is far more common than might be suspected.

> Sometimes I find it difficult to talk about race due to my lack of experience. I feel that I have very little to say in terms of other races and I don't know how to define my own white race. Race rarely enters my mind because I'm not around enough people who aren't white for the most part. I think before I can feel more

competent talking about race, I need to determine what race means to me. (Sheila).

Several of the participants reported having friendships with those who were racially different. Yet interestingly enough, they reported that their conversations never revolved around any issues of race or remained superficial at best. For some, these conversations rarely took place simply because race did not come up. For others, these types of discussions would have been uncomfortable. Whatever the case, this was an opportunity for deeper understanding that was often missed.

> I would have to say no, that I haven't had much experience with racial dialogue. (My town) is a very white community. It's full of fairly racist folks, my father being one of them. I worked in a health club with some black guys I came to think of as my best friends. I'd like to think I look more on the inside than outside. Having been divorced, I know about being judged. (Bonnie).

> With my friends, it just didn't come up a lot. This is a very touchy subject and I guess we just chose not to talk about it. My grandpa still talks about it almost every time I see him. He still calls African-Americans "colored folks." We didn't see a lot of people other than white folks in my town. (Joan).

> Race isn't really discussed, even though I have friends who were different from me. In high school, I had a really close black friend and it never came up. I've been in classes where we discussed tolerance and diversity and historical events and their impact, but it was more of a lecture in these classes. Even then we never *really* talked about it. I had this sociology class that was all about divisions between race, ethnicity, class, gender. It was enlightening, but the professor didn't encourage long discussions. I guess she had so much material to cover (Lacy).

By contrast, a number of other participants stated that within their circle of friends, race was a fairly easy topic to discuss and that they did so with some regularity. Although Laney felt safe within her circle of friends to risk racial dialogue, she did not feel ready to initiate or participate in conversations beyond these friends.

> Race is one of those areas that even the most unprejudiced person feels uncomfortable addressing. I can discuss issues of race with my close friends, but outside that, I am really out of my comfort zone and I feel really weird. I'm not a

racist person, but there is still that barrier there because I don't feel comfortable. (Laney).

Tom reported that race was regularly 'discussed' within his circle. This researcher sensed that race may not have been critically examined, but may have simply reinforced long-held beliefs by these friends. Tom and his friends felt free to discuss race in a way that they may have not shared with an interracial group. This kind of 'closed' intra-group racial dialogue is also practiced by other racial groups as well.

> When I hang out with my friends from the south, it is a natural part of almost any conversation. Most times, we're just hanging out and it's just informal conversation, nothing too deep. We'll say whatever when we're talking. We'll use nicknames, sure. We'll even use slurs. It wasn't a big deal. That's just the way we talk. It doesn't mean anything. (Tom).

When Tom was asked if he would be comfortable engaging in a conversation about race with someone who was not white, his answer came quickly.

> No, I would feel uncomfortable. I wouldn't initiate it, but not because I can't talk to someone I don't know. It's like, why bring it up, like my grandmother used to say. Just because to even bring it up, there's gonna be problems. If the situation called for it, yeah, I could talk about it. But it's not something I would bring up at dinner. Everybody knows that it's there, different races. I've really gotten turned off to beating things to death. I think we should all just let it go. All that stuff happened a long time ago. And besides, I wasn't there. I don't want to be blamed for something I didn't do and I wasn't even there! (Tom).

Restricted by Fear and Political Correctness

A strong theme with several participants is that fear and discomfort dominate their actions around racial dialogue. Many factors contribute to these feelings, but several student participants expressed concern about their lack of knowledge and experience with those who are racially different. Student participants also voiced concern about offending others as well as their fear of being labeled a racist, simply because their inexperience may cause their comments to be misconstrued. Particularly with the current social climate

of political correctness and the numerous incidents of verbal blunders highlighted in the

media, students are wary of venturing into areas of uncertainty.

> I am really uncomfortable initiating a conversation about race with someone who isn't white. Talk about race with my friends? Probably. I work with the public a lot. Everybody comes to my job, all races, ages, all economic backgrounds. I find myself being really careful, because I don't ever want anyone to get the wrong impression and think that I'm a racist. (Harriet).

> I was afraid to even participate in this study because I didn't want to say something stupid. And that was before I knew you would be African-American. Once I walked in and discovered you were an African-American woman, I just knew this would be an awkward situation. It made me more aware of being politically correct and it made me think the interview would be biased. (Bonnie).

The participants had strong opinion about the value of political correctness in

contemporary society. While most expressed a strong desire not to offend others, they

expressed their resistance to the idea of censored speech, which is how the participants

characterized political correctness. For some students, concern centered around the ability

to have meaningful and unrestricted dialogue. Students seemed to feel that the pressure to

be politically correct was prohibitive to their growth and their interactions with others.

> I always think 'let's make sure not to offend anyone.' But as I've gotten older, I realize that being politically correct isn't always the right thing to do. Sometimes it hurts more than it helps. Other people have questions as well and so do I. Being so afraid of the 'pc police,' everybody's afraid and nothing gets asked! So how are we ever supposed to learn about each other if we're too afraid to talk? (Laney)

> I think the whole thing is outta whack! Sure, I don't want to offend anyone when I talk to them. This whole thing just irritates me. We're all so busy being concerned about pc and focused so much on our differences, we can barely have a general conversation about *anything!* (Bonnie)

Others, like Catherine and Tom, felt that the politically correct movement had

reached a point of uselessness and they expressed resentment and resistance, but for

completely different reasons. Catherine seemed to feel that the media used potentially

racial incidents for their own agenda; fueling racial tensions and conflict would certainly

capture the public's attention. Tom had no use for political correctness at all. He seemed

angry that some chose to express their heritage in a hyphenated way (e.g. African-

American, Asian-American) and also seemed to resent the notion that he should do the

same.

> Sometimes I just feel like these issues have been beaten to death. I don't think we should ignore race because racism is out there. But I also don't feel like I want to have someone in my face always telling me 'you're a racist cause you said this or that.' The media finds any opportunity to take a story, put a race spin on it and run with it. I don't want to ignore racism. But I don't want something made a race issue for ratings. On TV, they find the most ignorant people to put on the screen to talk about their views. And they just sit back and watch the sparks fly. It's disgusting. (Catherine).

> This whole pc thing is stupid. Some people are just easily offended and you may not have even meant anything by what you said. Everybody wants to be called a hyphenated this or a hyphenated that. Look, in the south, you're black. You're not African-American. The whole thing is so completely stupid that I don't even pay attention to it most of the time. (Tom).

And finally, Jack summarized the feelings of many as he struggled to make sense

of the complexity of racial dialogue. He felt hopeful that "things" would get better and

saw the opportunity to participate in a focus group such as this, where dialogue was

thoughtfully and respectfully carried out, as positive. At the same time, he was concerned

that too much focus on racial issues actually contributed to more divisions between racial

groups.

> Sometimes I really think because we keep bringing up race, we make things worse. At the same time, I think because we try to suppress it by being politically correct, *that* makes it worse. It's a Catch-22! I think our conversation is really good because people are talking and thinking and being respectful. Since you told us to be open and you seem really encouraging, it's been pretty easy to open up. Any other time, I'd be too concerned about being politically correct to say anything! I would never want to be misunderstood and called a racist. Most times I wouldn't say anything at all. Sometimes I get really frustrated. I want things to be better for everyone, but … it's just hard. (Jack).

Meaningful Dialogue

Some student participants recalled that in some rare instances, they have been a part of or witnessed meaningful racial dialogue. Although certainly not a universal occurrence among the participants, interracial friendships sometimes paved the way for these types of conversations that moved beyond the superficial. For one student, such a conversation occurred when a friend of another race revealed a long held secret about her own upbringing and confusion. This student spoke of the openness of their exchange and given the sensitive nature of their conversation, the lack of offense felt between them.

> When I was in high school, my best friend was black. Her family was the only black family in the neighborhood at the time. She talked about when she was a little girl, she wanted to make her skin white and her hair blond and long! This really stuck with me. She really wanted to fit in with everybody who was around her. We talked about this a lot and it was amazing. She said she'd never told anyone about that. I asked her questions and she asked me questions. Nobody got offended. We were just good friends. I wish I could have conversations with people like that now. (April).

One participant developed a friendship with an African-American male who revealed the discrimination and harassment he had experienced by the town's police force. Jack recalled that these painful events opened an avenue for deeper discussion for the two friends.

> I now have a friend who is black. He and I do the usual stuff, like play ball, go out to the bars. But for the last few months, we've started to talk more. We'll see stuff in the news, especially stuff that has happened here in (the research site). He tells me all the time about how the police treat him and other black guys here in town. He's told me how many times he gets pulled over by the police and he's hasn't done anything. They don't ticket him, they don't arrest him. They just pull him over, search his car with dogs and harass him. This has happened to him 4 times already and school just started! He'll tell me how that makes him feel and it's rough. He gets really angry about it, but he said he knows the 'rules of the game.' He knows he can't argue with the police or yell at them. He told me that that would be just the thing they were waiting on him to do so they would have a reason to take him in. When he started telling me all this, we just started talking about race in (this city) and how it is in the rest of the country. I have to admit, I

feel really helpless to do something. I also feel really embarrassed to be a white guy sometimes. (Jack).

Sometimes the student participants were fortunate enough to 'stumble' into meaningful dialogue with a group of their peers during a shared activity. Although political discussions can sometimes become heated, Paul spoke of an experience where a discussion about recent political elections offered an opportunity for meaningful dialogue on race. While other students shared information about their elders' perspectives and offered their contemporary viewpoint, Paul seemed to feel quite capable of contributing to the conversation because of classroom learning that had taken place for him. He began to recognize the value of coursework that connected to real life social opportunities.

> One night a bunch of us were sitting in my dorm room, watching t.v. There were stories on about the 2000 and 2004 elections and how they were handled, especially in Florida where a lot of black folks apparently were prevented from voting. I didn't know anything about this. My friends and I, I'd say the group was about half black and half white, started talking about the election and what it's like for them to hear their parents and grandparents talk about how things don't seem to have changed much for black people. We asked them what they meant by that and they started telling us about the difference in education, the difference in living conditions, how hard it was for them to even look for apartments and jobs and on and on. I felt good because of all the stuff I'd learned in my literature class and I was comfortable with the conversation. Luckily this wasn't a one-time conversation. I really feel that I'm learning a lot just by talking to my friends about this kind of stuff. (Paul)

Key Influences On Their Perspectives

While the previous sections outlined what the participants know and feel about race as well as how they engaged in racial dialogue, this section of the chapter will explore key factors helping to shape the current perspective of the students. Of the three major influences presented here, family and media seemed to resonate the most with the students, providing a foundation for the their future attitudes.

Early family interactions strongly influenced how pre-service students perceived and reacted to racial issues. While a few of the participants reported receiving overt messages from their families about the value of acceptance, several students reported growing up in families where bigotry was openly displayed and taught. Some of the participants rebelled against these family influences, and they spoke of feeling alienated and sometimes ridiculed because of their decisions. Other participants chose to quietly explore new experiences with those who were racially different, choosing not to reveal friendships, dating partners or new knowledge obtained.

Early media also played a potent role in helping to shape the attitudes and perspectives of the student participants. The interviews showed that while some television shows helped the students expand their vision of those racially different, local and national news reports powerfully fueled stereotypes that many of the students struggled against. Contemporary music also played a role in the reinforcement of racial stereotypes, as students spoke of the influence of the lyrics and culture of hip-hop and rap.

These early experiences still resonated with the students as they discussed how they came to hold their current attitudes about race.

Families' Influences Weigh Heavily

The participants' recollections of interactions with parents and other relatives seemed to be the most powerful force helping to shape their perspectives and these influences ranged the full spectrum. For some students, their parents were very deliberate in their efforts to teach the participants the value of treating all people with kindness, openness and dignity. A number of these parents stated that they themselves were raised

in homes with rampant bigotry. For other students, multi-generational prejudice was on full display for the participants to witness throughout their lifetime. The responses to these influences were varied as the students strained to determine for themselves where their perspectives would fall.

Raised Without Prejudice

Jack recalled a family life where "My mom and dad instilled in me that color does not matter, but the character of the person does." He stated that the "most important source" for his racial perspective came from his parents, but credits his extended family as well.

> I never heard any racial jokes or comments. I am lucky that my parents adopted my sister from Korea because this helped to reinforce this teaching. I have uncles and cousins who are black and interracial. My extended family has also helped me to discount color as a way of judging people. They are the most open and caring people I know, and will invite anyone over to parties and celebrations and dinners, etc. My family's behavior reinforced their principles. (Jack).

Another student recalled her memories of growing up with a young African-American male that her mom fostered. Although there were challenges in adapting for both she and her foster brother, she appreciated the opportunity to closely interact with someone racially different. Harriet also acknowledged her mother for offering her foster brother a home and for the joys and lessons on race this situation brought to their family.

> My mom was raised with a very racist father. But as long as I've known her, I don't remember her ever saying anything negative about other people. My father was a different story and I now wonder if that contributed to their divorce. When my parents got divorced, my mom and I moved away from our small town to a medium sized city with a lot more diversity. My mom ended up fostering a young African-American guy and he came to live with us. It was really good because he and I really became siblings and we shared a lot. But at the same time, his culture was really different from mine and those times were tough. The music he listened to was really different. As we both got older, we began to share a love of each other's music. It's funny, because he never let his friends know he liked 'white' music. This experience really helped me to get to know, not just my foster

brother, but his friends and his extended family. I admire my mom for what she did and appreciate the lessons about race I was able to learn because of this situation. (Harriet).

Catherine reported that she feels "very blessed to come from a home that rejoices in people's differences instead of fearing them." She did, however, point to other relatives in her family having very strong views about race and racial matters.

> Both my parents were raised in an environment that was very racist. Their parents made no bones about how they felt about the mixing of the races, being around black folks. God forbid, if either of my parents had decided to date someone black. I really believe their parents would have disowned them. Somehow, both my parents were able to rebel against the way they were raised and they found each other in college. They are a good match because they both tend to see the world the same way. It makes it very difficult with family visits and reunions because the insults and the racism just flies when we're around our extended relatives. Sometimes it really makes my stomach queasy. (Catherine).

Toxic Bigotry

On the opposite end of the spectrum of parental influence, several students recalled being raised in environments that they said were quite toxic. Students often witnessed parents, grandparents or other relatives speaking of those who were racially different in an extremely negative manner. For example, a lesson taught in school about the greatness of Dr. Martin Luther King brought a completely opposite reaction once the topic was brought home.

> I can remember coming home from school when I was about eight years old and asking my father about Dr. King. We'd talked about him a little at school that day and I was curious. This was the first time we'd ever talked about anybody black before in school. I thought he had to be really important for him to be taught in our textbook and talked about in school. My father looked at me with his mouth open when I asked about Dr. King. He started to yell, 'What the hell are they teaching you up at that ***damn school?!! He was a ***damn trouble-maker in the 60's! That's who he was!' For the rest of that night, my father stomped around the house, cussing under his breath. That was my father's explanation to me about Dr. King. (Tom).

These early experiences with bigotry helped to shape the students' attitudes and perspectives in numerous ways. One participant who formed an early friendship with an African-American girl, discovered her father's prejudice because of this friendship. This revelation caused April not to expose her friend to her father's prejudice. Spending more time at her friend's house, April benefited because she drew closer to her friend's family. Via this family relationship, she experienced a cross-racial friendship beyond the superficial.

> I had a really good friend when I was in kindergarten. She was African-American and her family eventually moved right into our neighborhood. When I told my parents about them moving close to us, my father talked about the neighborhood 'going to hell' and that 'God didn't mean for us to live close to those animals.' That was the first time I realized my father was a racist. It made me sick and I never invited my friend over to my house. Funny though, her family always invited me to visit her, spend the night with her, have dinner with them. Talking about it now, I never thought of her as African-American before I heard my father say that. She was just my friend. Maybe I'd just considered her to be white. (April).

Like April, other student participants sometimes managed to develop friendships or even mentoring relationships with teachers across racial lines and often, this information could not be easily shared at home. The students reported fearing alienation and personal ridicule from their family. Yet there was a determination from these participants to try to accept racially different people, even if it meant they would put distance between themselves and their family members. These students rebelled and decided they would not limit themselves or their experiences with people who were different from themselves.

> As I grew up and my feelings about race and racism developed more, I argued with my grandfather a lot. He would make all these ignorant and racist comments about other races, but then he started to direct them to me too! He treated me as if I was completely stupid and not worth him even talking to. I finally just gave up on dealing with him and just accepted that he was never going to change. I really

get why my father feels the way he does. He's just like my grandfather. He learned it from him. I am at a different place mentally from lots of people in my family. I know that everyone in the world is equal. There is no difference between me and the next guy or girl. We all should have the same opportunities, advantages and experiences. It still hurts that I don't really have anybody in my family I can talk to without them talking down to me. (Paul).

When I was growing up and all through my adult life really, all I heard was all this racist crap coming from my family. I heard it from the time I was a little girl and every damn time I go home I still have to hear it! I grew up in the country with my folks and they didn't even KNOW anybody black. But they sure did have plenty of opinions about black people. When I could, I got the hell outta there and came to college here. When I left, my father and my grandfather just kept telling me not to get to school and 'start hangin' out with them n***s.' It made me sick to my stomach. Of course, I was determined to not be as close-minded as they are so I did develop friendships with everybody they warned me against. black folks, Jews, gay folks, Hispanic people. I've dated black men numerous times before I was married and since my divorce. I have managed to develop friendships with black men and women here at the University and at my old job. I can never take them to meet my folks. I wouldn't do that to them. (Bonnie).

Anthony experienced an upbringing where the family's ancestry was stressed as being superior to all others. Although he described himself as white when asked by this researcher to racially identify himself, he expanded on his heritage and his family's views.

My family actually came from Germany. As long as I can remember, my grandparents, my parents – really just about all our relatives – told us that we were better than just about anybody walking. It was shocking, you know, because as I grew up and learned about the Holocaust, it was devastating to me. I never told anyone in class that my family was German. I was too embarrassed. I remember I came home one day from high school and asked my family about the Holocaust. Was it true, you know? And they all admitted that yeah, it was true. But my grandparents said that it was the right thing to do. That's exactly what they said. Killing all those people was the right thing to do! They also said that we should not be ashamed of our history. To hold our head up high! That we were better than anybody else in this country. Especially Jews and blacks. My grandfather didn't actually use the words Jews or blacks … (voice trailed off, head down. Anthony).

Tom revealed a household where multi-generational prejudice and bigotry was 'normal' for his upbringing. Throughout the interview, Tom revealed a perspective strongly shaped by his father, grandfather, other relatives and friends. Never encouraged to think critically or form his own perspective, Tom often mirrored the attitudes and perspectives he grew up with. Although now exposed to opportunities to explore other views, Tom primarily seemed to hold to the perspectives garnered from his family influences.

> At first, I didn't know much about other races, aside from what my parents and grandparents told me. None of them placed very much importance on races other than our own. I was really narrowly exposed to other people and my parents and grandparents didn't encourage me to have my own views. My parents are racists in many ways. My grandfather was and is the most racist person I have ever known. He hates everybody, especially black people! But really, it's everybody! People who are different from him in any way are not equal to him in worth. I grew up with these ideas brainwashed into my mind. (Tom).

Race and Class Superiority

For some participants racial superiority was stressed in their homes, particularly superiority over African-Americans. Interestingly, in the beginning of the interview Sheila described her interaction with those racially different as very limited and spoke of her town as having "a lot of Mexicans now." When we got to the point of the interview where we talked about influences on their racial perspective, Sheila revealed something about her heritage that was surprising.

> Although I identified myself as white in the beginning of this interview, I'm actually half white and half Hispanic. I started to think about the question of who influenced my racial perspective and I realized that I feel superior to other races and I learned it from my family! They felt racially superior to other races and had no problem saying so. They always talked bad about anybody who was not Mexican. But they also talked bad about Mexicans who came to this country recently and especially if they are illegal! Oh my God, that is the worst! But I think I've been able to find a happy medium and feel comfortable talking about

race. I don't believe or consider myself to be racist, even with my parents' and grandparents' views. (Sheila).

Like a number of the participants, Sheila admitted to be feeling conflicted about her own racial identity and embarrassed by her family's prejudices.

Paul reported that his family might have been okay with him having friendships with black classmates, as long as "they were of my own socioeconomic status." He went on to elaborate that race was secondary to class in his family's eyes.

> My dad always talked about lower class blacks, lower class Mexicans. He always described them all as lazy, dangerous or criminals. He never saw it any other way. When I would tell him about some of the things I saw on the news or had learned here in college – you know about poverty and unfair treatment for blacks and Mexicans in jobs and education and money – he would just cut me off. He never saw things differently and after awhile I just stopped talking to him about it. Funny thing is, my family isn't rich or anything. We are working class, just like a lot of the people he talked about. But in his eyes, we were just so much better and that was that. (Paul).

Struggling for Perspective

Some participants admit to the struggle to make sense of the world that their parents or grandparents warned them about, and the world many of them wanted to explore. Particularly as they began to attend college, they reported being exposed to ideas in their classes and in their readings that made them start to question how they had been raised.

> My dad grew up in Chicago where he attended schools and lived in neighborhoods where the majority was African-American and the whites were the minority. My dad told me stories about what happened at school. One time a group of African-Americans picked my dad up when he was walking down the hall at school. They were going to throw him in the pool, but the doors were locked so they let him go. My dad would tell me about the countless fights that happened between African-Americans and between the African-Americans and whites. Many of the fights ended with somebody going to the hospital. Sometimes they came back to school and sometimes they didn't because they feared being killed the next time. These stories made me think badly about African-Americans because I didn't understand why they were so cruel. It just seemed to be part of

their lifestyle to act that way. I thought they didn't have compassion for other people and that they didn't care what happened to them. Today I realize these stories are not representative of all African-Americans. But it is still such a struggle not to look at black people, particularly black men, like they are all like animals. This was my dad, after all. (Laney).

I try hard to be open-minded when it comes to African-Americans. I try not to assume anything or stereotype them. But it is very hard. They often act so different from anything I'm used to. A lot of times they come off as really loud and aggressive, even the women. Since I've been in school, I see black students going to class just like me. I see them studying in the Union and laughing and talking with their friends, just like I do. So many times, I just feel confused. I know what I've been taught, I know what I see with my own eyes. But I also remember what my folks taught me and I know what I feel. Sometimes I feel really nervous when I'm in the minority and African-Americans are in the majority, like when I'm in Chicago. I notice that I become nervous and tense. (Lisa).

The Influence of Media

While the participants reported that their parents were the strongest influences shaping their current perspectives, they also claimed that television and other forms of media were clearly important. The students clarified that in some ways television shows and some movies helped broaden their perspective about those racially different, while the news deepened their stereotypes and fear of 'the other.' They reported that shows like 'The Cosby Show' and 'Family Matters' showed African-American people were 'just like everyone else,' and provided a perspective to counter-balance the negativity of newscasts. The students mentioned a Cosby Show spin-off, A Different World, as positively influencing how they saw African-American college students. Interestingly, several students spoke of 'black music' as contributing to their negative perceptions of African-Americans. Given that music companies report that the vast majority of consumers purchasing rap and hip-hop music are young and white, this perspective was surprising.

Most of my knowledge of African-Americans comes from the media. I used to watch shows like The Cosby Show, Family Matters and Different World. I think the people in these shows were very easy to relate to and they didn't seem to be very different from me. These shows never made me think any less of African-Americans. I believe that the popular music of most African-Americans contributes to our notion of them. Most of their songs contain cursing, drugs, sex or violence, so we associate these things with African-Americans. The news, movies and music all send this negative view of African-Americans. I try not to believe all these stereotypes, but sometimes it is hard when those negative ideas are constantly thrown in your face. (Laney).

The Cosby Show was on television and portrayed the more than successful black family. I think I thought that this was just for entertainment and that black families really didn't act like that in real life. That's certainly not the case though and if I'd opened my eyes, I would have discovered there are many successful and wealthy black families. I now know there are many black people who do good and charitable work, too. But you rarely ever see that on the news. (Anthony).

Women of color have not escaped the notice of our student participants. For those who did not have much interaction with African-American women prior to enrolling in college, they noted the portrayal of black women in the media as influencing their beliefs. The participants mentioned the portrayal of African-American women as oversexed, aggressive and irresponsible. Although Jack spoke about the negativity of media portrayals of black women, this did not alter his perspective and did not prevent him from dating an African-American young woman.

It seems that television doesn't paint a positive picture of any minority. They don't show Asians hardly at all, so it's almost like they don't exist. They only show Hispanics a little more than Asians, although it seems like it's getting a little better for them. Black women? Man, the videos make them look like they are really promiscuous and dumb. I'm glad I was raised so I'd know to ask questions before I just believe anything I see on television. I've had a couple of black girlfriends and they were nothing like they are portrayed in television. (Jack).

The news media received most of the criticism from the student participants when it came to negatively influencing their beliefs and attitudes about those who were racially different. They blamed the national and local news for biased reporting and stressed their

belief that the media was responsible for feeding fear into the general public regarding

minorities, particularly black men.

> One thing I always remember was the news on television. That is where I saw the largest number of black people because it seemed like every five minutes they were dragging some black man up on screen and talking about a murder or robbery or something. These stories is where stereotypes develop. Of course, I stereotyped blacks as a child. What else was there to base my opinion off of than the news telling me how they were always killing people and stealing stuff. (Anthony).

> I think the news may have caused me to be more afraid of African-American males, especially when I'm alone. Whenever there is a murder, they always show black men in handcuffs, being led away by white policeman. If this were to happen occasionally, maybe I wouldn't think much about it. But on our local news, almost every time they show some black guy being arrested for something. It makes you think that *all* black guys are *always* guilty of some crime. It has made it very difficult for me to get those pictures out of my head and try to be neutral when it comes to being around black men (emphasis hers). (Joan).

The Influence of Friends

Many of the students had vivid childhood memories of race and racial differences

as they began to form early interracial friendships. After family and media influences, the

relationship with these friends seemed to be third in the order of significance in shaping

the racial perspective of the participants. In some cases, these friendships taught the

students about prejudice as they experienced disapproval from some adults and other

classmates. The student participants recalled they learned to be wary of expecting others

to be open to their relationships; the participants often chose to be secretive instead.

Other students recalled that these early friendships gave them the open opportunity to

closely experience differences and similarities between people. In some cases, these

friendships lasted for a number of years; some also dissipated with graduations or family

relocation.

First Racial Encounters

Most student participants remember noticing the physical differences between themselves and other children at very young ages. One student recalled her curiosity about how other people's bodies functioned because of these striking differences.

> I remember in kindergarten trying to figure out the whole color thing with people. I saw posters with people of all colors and I wondered stuff like if my eyes worked the same as theirs. I was really aware of other people even when I was little. In first grade, I became friends with the only African-American girl in my grade. We stayed friends for years and I feel that I learned a lot from her and her family. I learned how much alike our families were and to not be afraid of African-American people. (Catherine).

Other participants recall their curiosity when they encountered those who looked "so completely different" from themselves. They also wondered why they would often find themselves getting disapproving looks from their parents when they would ask questions about "those people." (April). From this they learned that directly talking about or asking questions about racial differences was not always acceptable.

> I remember the first time I saw a black person. I remember my mother and I walking downtown and I saw this little girl, about my size and age, walking with her mother. She had this deep brown skin and I remember staring at her. I remember thinking how lucky she was to have all that chocolate on her hands and arms and that she could just lick it off! (Joan).

> When I was about 8 or so, I remember seeing a black woman in a store when I was in with my parents. I remember looking this woman up one way and down the other. I then asked my parents in a really loud voice "What's wrong with that lady?! Is her skin burned?" I remember my parents told me to be quiet and then they dragged me away from the woman. I looked back at her as they were dragging me away and she was staring at all of us with a look of disgust on her face. (Bonnie).

One student recalled not focusing on race and color differences until junior high. She reported that she had never experienced parental conversations about race and felt unprepared for interactions with people who were racially different. Eventually she was

able to form relationships with African-Americans and she came to appreciate her early experiences in junior high school.

> Every morning I had a 30 minute bus ride to school and the bus was filled with African-Americans. For the first time in my life, I was aware of the color of my skin and felt a little of what it must be like to be a minority. They were all friends with each other and only a few of them started to talk to me and let me sit with them. I didn't know what to say and I didn't know how to act. These kids were very different from any I'd been around before. But I really believed this experience helped me later on. Now I've known a lot of African-Americans. I've had a good friend since high school and I've had a few black boyfriends and teachers. (Lisa).

Adolescent Friendships

When some students recalled forming friendships with children across racial lines, these friendships seemed to be filled with the usual mix of fun, occasional fights and families living very similar lives. Some of the students had fond memories of growing up with children who were different from themselves, yet those differences did not seem to interfere with their bond. For some, these friendships seemed to solidify the student participants perceptions that 'people are just people.' As their friendships grew, the participants reported the issue of race became less relevant.

> I grew up with an African-American family that lived a couple of blocks from my house. The kids in this family were around the same ages as my brother and me. They went to our school and also went to our church so we saw a lot of each other growing up. They moved across town while we were in junior high so we didn't see each other as much as before. Color never occurred to me. They were just like we were and my parents never acted any differently towards them. (Jack).

By contrast, several of the students began to notice that other white children and some parents of those children sometimes treated their African-American friends differently. It appears difference was not always well tolerated in their small communities.

In my town, a lot of people would call minorities cruel names. I thought it was always interesting that they judged an entire race of people without ever knowing anyone from that race. The town had about a 20% minority population but the dividing lines were clear between black families and white families. At school the racial lines were clear as well. In junior high, the cafeteria was very segregated. I don't think this was intentional, I just think it was the way things were. I also think that if you didn't live by one another, it was hard to break those racial boundaries and be close at school. (April).

Sometimes even the participants' own friends and family made negative comments about the friendships they formed across racial lines. As illustrated elsewhere in the study, their comments reverberated with the participants for years to come.

When I was in second grade, an African-American family moved into our town. I became friends with their boy and we would always hang out after school and at recess. My parents didn't support this friendship. They would make derogatory statements about him and call me names, too. (Paul).

In high school, sports led to a lot of mixing of the races. I began to have friends who were black and I dated a black guy for awhile in high school. Although my mom never said anything negative, a lot of my friends and their parents did not approve. Nothing was ever said to my face, but I knew about how they all talked behind my back. (Laney).

The kinds of humiliation and teasing the student participants recalled seemed to be painful memories. Some students spoke of their friends being called by the "n" word or that they themselves were called "n*** lovers" by their peers or even their relatives. Several of them attempted to explain away this treatment ("that's just how my family is"), but these were memories that were very much alive for them in the present. (Paul).

The Impact of College Friends

Finally, students were asked about the influence of their college peers on their current perspectives on racial differences. Although some of the participants were developing interracial friendships, most had not at the time of the focus groups; most of the participants' friends were of the same race. These college friendships still provided an

opportunity to discuss and explore issues of the day, topics raised in classes or new things

they are experiencing now that they were away from home. Harriet's group of friends

helped each other to critically examine new information, although often their discussion

raised more questions than answers.

> You know, my girlfriends and I talk about some of the stuff we're learning in classes about different races. We'll talk about books we're reading, or even professors we have who may be black or Asian. We talk about some of the stuff we're learning and realize how different a lot of this stuff is compared to what we thought we knew when we first got here. It's a real trip! A lot of times, I don't even know what to make of all the stuff I'm learning. It's good that we have each other to at least ask questions to. We don't have answers half the time, but we have plenty of questions. I think this is what college is all about though. To start asking questions. (Harriet)

Some participants tended to choose friends who reinforced their already held

beliefs. This provided an opportunity to either encourage exploration of new ideas with

new people if that was their inclination.

> All my friends are very open. None are racist in any way. My best friend is dating a black guy but it's not going over well with her parents. Me and my friends are very supportive of it. He's just like us – he's goofy and very open. (Joan).

In Tom's case, he seemed to choose to continue his family's multi-generational bigotry

by connecting with friends who reinforced those beliefs.

> My friends were pretty much raised like me. Their parents didn't believe in the mixing of the races much at all. So my friends believe the same thing. I don't too much like the idea of blacks and whites marrying each other either. I just think it will cause too many problems so why do it? The children will suffer, your own parents will be mad. What's the point? None of my friends have ever dated anyone that wasn't white. (Tom)

Some report dating interracially, now that they are enrolled in college. Like they

experienced with some of the childhood friendships, many of these students face

humiliation and resentment for dating those who are racially different from family or

friends. For some, interracial relationships are a natural extension of their perspectives; to

accept people who are different as equal. For others, dating across racial groups may be a continuation of early rebellion. In either case, close relationships provided opportunities to interact with those who are racially different beyond a superficial level.

> When I go home and even here on campus, you get discriminated against if you are a white woman dating a black man. I'm not sure if the white guys are intimidated or just jealous, but it is not very accepted. Many of my white girlfriends date black guys and they are ridiculed for it to their faces and behind their backs. Even though my parents were really racist, it never stopped me or my brother from having black friends or listening to R & B and hip-hop. Once I moved out on my own, I date whomever I want to without worrying about what my family thinks. I hope I don't treat anybody any differently either. (Joan).

Hope Endures

The final segment of the focus group discussions encouraged the students to envision their future in their own classrooms. They were asked to discuss any concerns they had about teaching students who would be racially different from themselves. Several themes emerged as the participants spoke of their fears, optimism and sense of responsibility they felt for students they had yet to meet. Although they had all revealed their convoluted experiences with race, every participant expressed a belief that they would rise to the task of being excellent teachers. One concern was repeated across all four focus groups, however. their desire to be prepared for practical situations (e.g. angry parents, racial tension) as well as curricular and other resource concerns (e.g. where to find culturally relevant literature).

Envisioning the Future

One student reported an encounter with an African-American co-worker which made her question her decision to teach in the inner city. This co-worker raised questions about the students' motivation for wanting to teach in an urban environment and seemed to imply that the participant had an agenda. This confrontation served to instill doubts in

the participant, yet she seemed determined to continue with her goal of teaching where

she felt she could contribute the most help.

> I had a conversation with an African-American woman last summer where I was working. She asked me why I wanted to teach and why did I want to teach in (large city near research site). I told her that I want to go where I thought I might be needed and could help. She got really angry with me and said that I'd been watching to many of those 'white savior' movies! She warned me that if I was going in to 'save all the little black kids' they would eat me alive! I didn't understand why she got so mad at me and why she acted like I was doing something wrong. For a long time this made me feel bad about what I wanted to do and made me question why I even wanted to do it. I still plan to go to that school system, and I hope I'll be alright. (Lisa).

Several participants focused on the serious responsibility they felt to their future

students. For example, Harriet spoke of her determination to delve into issues of

difference and not to simply gloss over them. She wanted to offer her students an

opportunity to learn in a more balanced way and she felt it her duty to provide that kind

of environment for them.

> I'm nervous but this is so important. There are so many things to focus on. I want to teach more to different races … I don't want young African-American kids to feel like all white people are terrible. But they will feel that way if you're teaching in an unbalanced way. (Harriet).

A few participants envisioned their future classrooms as a multiracial, fully

integrated place where reciprocal learning could take place, for the participants as well as

their students. They expressed their desire for their future students to feel welcomed and

supported and hoped to model, by example, the inclusiveness they wanted their own

students to experience.

> I really don't want a classroom full of students like me. I really hope to make everyone feel comfortable and accepted and hope to encourage my students to share who they are and their culture with other students in the class. I think it is important for me to lead my class by example. If I'm interested and curious about all of them, hopefully they will be interested and curious about each other too. (Laney).

> I hope to be involved in a school that has a high percentage of minority students. I think we have so much to learn from each other. I didn't have the most diverse childhood and I want to catch up on what I may have missed and continue to surround myself with others from different races and cultures. (April).

Again, concerns about the intersection of race and class were raised. Student participants seemed to place a great deal of focus on economic differences, with concern that these differences together with race will place great stress on them as teachers and the classroom environment as well. It seems that unspoken in the minds of the students is that issues of race can be more easily handled than issues of race and class together.

> I'm not worried about dealing with the little ones. I'm worried about dealing with the parents! Not just the racial issue but class and economic things as well. I hear stories about dealing with single moms. I hear about dealing with parents who don't speak English. That's what I'm really concerned with. (Lisa).

What They Need Most

Our student participants were asked what they felt they needed most in their academic training to be the best possible teachers for diverse students. Again, their answers seem to focus in one area. they felt they needed more practical education. Anthony summarized the concern of several participants when he asked about the practicality of classroom management. Acknowledging their own trepidation at venturing into racial discussions, several participants nodded in agreement as Anthony expressed his concerns.

> I want to know how to deal with issues of racism if they happen in my class. How do I handle that? How do I keep peace? What if their parents misunderstand me? How do I handle that? How do I celebrate other cultures? I mean, what *exactly* should I do? (Anthony).

Some participants responded that an opportunity to participate in more racial dialogue while still in college, a way to gain experience, would be useful. It was felt that

this training would encourage the participants to model and teach reflective thinking, and

exploring events from multiple perspectives. They also felt that opportunities for candid

racial dialogue in their teacher training would allow them to "ask dumb questions,"

hopefully avoiding embarrassing classroom situations. (Bonnie).

> Actually our conversation has helped me a lot. Although I'd managed to have friends who are black as an adult, I realize how naïve I am. I never took the opportunity to talk to my friends about stuff that really mattered, like how did *they* feel about being in that small town. What was it like for them? I just assumed all was well with them. I think experience is the best teacher. Not only do we need field experiences that let us actually work in diverse classrooms, but then we need a place where we can ask 'dumb' questions and know that someone will answer them for us. We need more conversations like this. (Bonnie).

Student participants wanted to know where to locate resources to help prepare

themselves for diverse students; resources for their own learning as well as classroom

resources for their future students. Some participants are anxious that they will not know

enough about future students' culture or history to be effective. They are clear that they

want to offer their own students a more comprehensive education than they received.

> I want to know where to find resources, not just for my kids but for myself. There's so much I want to learn before I even get to my own classroom. I want to know where to find that stuff for my age and for their age too. I need to find things for all cultures and races, too. Where do I find this stuff? This is something that should be included in our training here in college. (Catherine).

> My own education has been about white Americans. All about how we triumphed over Native Americans and the Mexicans and conquered the west! Now that I think back on my own education, the story always came from one direction. So unless a white person looks for history involving other races, you'll never know it. I actually would like to read a full story of American history. That's something that should be required if you're going to be a teacher. I need more knowledge so I can teach the complete picture. (Laney).

> I actually agree with (Laney). The only history I know about is from the text books I had growing up. When I lived in the south, we had to take a state test to get out of elementary. They painted the whole thing like slavery wasn't such a bad thing. They basically taught us 'Well, they had to have somebody work.' Once I moved up north, I got a completely different history. (Tom).

Finally, students were concerned about their own continuing education. Some felt it necessary to consistently arm themselves with knowledge as a way of staying current in areas of racial diversity as well as other content areas. Others who felt unprepared stated that their previous education was inadequate and monocultural. They expressed their sense of responsibility for continued growth and knowledge so they could in turn, share this knowledge with their future students.

> I don't think you should be a teacher if you don't keep seeking to learn. I think one of our biggest problems is being un-prepared. It will be really nice to leave (the research site) with as much knowledge about race and other people as possible. (Paul).

> If my students leave my classroom with the same kind of knowledge I received when I was in high school, I will have failed them. The stuff I was taught was all one-sided. That's not the way the world is. It's not one-sided. I want my kids to know what's out there. I need to know what's out there so I can teach them. (April).

Their Final Words

Student participants seemed nervous, but determined to provide their future students with the best they could offer them in the way of education and social preparation. This researcher asked them if they wanted to end their focus groups with any final words. Two responses stood out which illustrate the complexity of racial experiences, particularly for pre-service teachers. Tom perfectly summarized one of the primary criticisms of multicultural education by some. the perspective that it offers advantages and attention to a set of students while taking away from others. Tom's final words.

> I wouldn't want my kids to feel too uncomfortable to ask questions. But at the same time, I wouldn't want students to feel like I was bringing special attention to some and ignoring others. We're all individuals but I plan to deal with all my students the same. (Tom).

By contrast, Jack ended his focus group on a note of hope and determination, altruism which has long been a part of the teaching profession. Jack foresaw a classroom where negative external forces will be challenged and learning can take place from multiple perspectives, mirroring his family upbringing. Jack's final words.

> I am at the very beginning of my teaching career. I was really lucky to have the parents I had and I want to make them proud of me. I want to reinforce to my students by my teaching and my behavior that character is what counts, not what people tell you that's negative. Skin color and racists do not determine your future. That's what I want them to know. I want to make sure that every student of mine gets an education that will prepare him for the real world. Each and every student should have this opportunity. That is my goal. (Jack)

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

For this research project, a self-selected group of 13 student participants volunteered to discuss race, a subject that is, at best, very uncomfortable for many young, white students. While the participants revealed a number of similar life events, they were not monolithic in their perspective or outlook. This study attempted to illustrate the diversity and complexities of experiences within this group.

Volunteering to discuss racial experience can be daunting. It is important to note that this small group of participants were special. of the 100 invitations extended to participate in this study, these 13 student participants committed to this project. Because this study was conducted with such a small and select group, the ability to generalize the findings of this study are limited, yet potentially instructive. The findings presented here are indicative of the complexities experienced by this group of pre-service teachers and leads to the question. Would a wider audience of white pre-service teachers discuss these issues in similar ways? Considering this question, examining the implications for additional research as well as focusing attention to expanding and deepening practice in the training of pre-service teachers may be warranted.

This chapter will offer a summary of the research findings as well as implications for further research and practice.

What They Know

Although a few of the participants lived in neighborhoods with some racial diversity, most grew up in cities and towns where the majority of the city's people, neighborhoods, churches and schools, were white. The interviews illustrated that participants' knowledge about race was very limited. While participants reported that

their families discussed racial issues at home, few could recount having informative, instructive discussions about race. Most report that their early academic education rarely exposed them to the history, culture, struggles or contributions made to this country by people of color nor opportunities to learn about and discuss issues of race. While their early education may have included a unit on the civil rights movement and the efforts of a major figure like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the participants generally stated that they did not enter college armed with more than superficial knowledge about race or racial issues. Several students expressed their ideas about affirmative action and from this researcher's vantage point, they appeared to be quite confused about the concept and the impetus for this policy. Their responses were often emotional rather than informed by background knowledge. The participants admitted they generally did not seek out racial information on their own.

Although this country is experiencing complex demographic changes, the relationship between blacks and whites are foremost in their minds. Many students recalled discussions about this racial dynamic while growing up (whether in positive terms or negative), and some reported friendships and dating experiences with African-Americans.

Their general lack of knowledge about race affected other areas of their lives. For example, the participants stated their discomfort about venturing into discussions about race because of their lack of information. They were unsure if their comments or questions would be correctly received and felt unprepared and naïve about interacting with those who were racially different.

Racial Thoughts and Feelings

Based on the interviews, a picture emerges of students struggling with complex and paradoxical feelings and thoughts about race. Many of these emotions centered around what they learned from their families, reported by the students to be the primary influence on their current racial perspectives. The student participants grappled with strong feelings and perspectives that sometimes then pitted them against their families' views. The interviews illustrated the struggle many of the participants faced as they began to grow into their roles as new teachers.

Of all the emotions expressed by the participants, anxiety resonated as an undercurrent in most of their interactions. As mentioned above, the students feared that their lack of knowledge would lead to misunderstandings and misperceptions. Having witnessed recent incidents where public figures faced embarrassment and condemnation as well as job related consequences, the students stated that they feared being caught in a similar backlash. Moreover, they did not want to risk being labeled as racist, particularly if they made what might be termed 'innocent mistakes' in racial encounters.

Taught as young children to think and perceive the world in a particular way by their families, as young adults some of the participants were now exposed to information and experiences that were completely different from home life. While some of the participants reported a sense of excitement because they were learning new ideas, others expressed feeling confusion because some concepts were so different from all that they learned at home.

Most participants generally reported a strong sense of acceptance of others, yet some also acknowledged feelings of guilt and shame as they tried to make sense of their

own prejudice and bigotry. A number of participants spoke of growing up with families whose perspectives the students considered as bigoted. For many participants, they expressed shame about their families' views. Many spoke of their efforts to juxtapose feelings of acceptance with lessons of bigotry and rejection learned from their families. Facing fears of disapproval and alienation from family as well as social contacts, some student participants expressed the feeling of being bombarded on all sides. Adding to their sense of shame, several students spoke of their guilt about remaining silent when they have witnessed acts of bigotry.

The interviews also highlighted students' sense of resentment and frustration in a number of areas. Students reported feeling resentful that a politically correct atmosphere prevented them from feeling comfortable enough to inquire about race. They did not feel prepared with enough knowledge about race to 'perform' in this way. In racial discussions, they often felt victimized and blamed for society's racial ills because of their skin color and their history. They also resented incidents that they attributed to 'reverse racism.' Stating their belief that the civil rights movement should have resolved the inequities of race, the participants also reported feelings of annoyance about the high level of attention that race and racism still receives in the 21st century. Many reported sometimes feeling that continued attention to an individual's race, as opposed to the individual, would prevent the country from moving forward in our social interactions.

How They Talk

Their experiences with racial dialogue prior to enrolling in their multicultural education course were also limited. Most participants reported they lacked early opportunities to engage in racial dialogue because their peers were primarily white.

Additionally their primary and secondary school classmates, educated in the same school systems, also did not receive a foundation of knowledge about race which might have proven to be a catalyst for racial dialogue. As the participants became young adults, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and fear prevented most from taking the risk to initiate or participate in racial dialogue with either their friends or associates. Although several student participants note that they have friends who are racially different, they stated that their dialogue often remains rather superficial and that discussions about race are infrequent. However, a few participants reported having opportunities for meaningful dialogue with friends or classmates. These students spoke of the encouragement they felt and the knowledge gained when these rare conversations occurred. They expressed their desire for more opportunities to engage in meaningful racial dialogue and to learn more about those who were racially different.

Key Influences

Overall, participants cited early family interactions and media exposure as key influences that shaped their current perspectives on race. While some participants reported they embraced these early experiences, many sought to distance themselves and determine their own path for racial understanding. Some participants spoke of their effort to make sense of their families' bigoted perspectives, particularly as they began to gain knowledge that was quite different from what they had previously learned. A few participants expressed gratitude for the worldview that their parents and family members presented to them, which seemed to make it easier for them to explore new experiences and risk attempts at racial dialogue.

The interviews illustrate that the participants felt conflicted about their media exposure in terms of racial perspective. Many credit their early media experiences with sitcoms as contributing to positive feelings about African-Americans, their families and college life. At the same time, some participants reported feelings of increased prejudice with exposure to news reports that they said presented an unrelentingly unbalanced view of African-Americans.

Their Future

Despite the wide range of complex and contradictory emotions the participants exhibited, they still reported feeling optimistic about their ability to teach in their future diverse classrooms and to provide their students with the best possible education. Those students expressed hope that they could implement a truly multicultural classroom and they vowed to provide their future students with the education about diversity they lacked as children. Many participants also expressed a desire for additional training to provide them with resources they might utilize in their future classrooms. More importantly, several students expressed a desire to seek additional opportunities to experience and 'practice' racial dialogue.

Review of Future Research/Implications for Future Research

Some multicultural education researchers posit that white students exhibit resistance to theories and practices presented in their courses. For example, Gay (2000), Wade, (1998) and Blum, (1998) concluded that white students found ways to avoid and resist delving into lessons on race or meaningful discussions about race. Although mindful of the small group of participants in this study, a deeper meaning may be prescribed to their actions. Based on the interviews of the participants, this study

illustrated that complex emotions and actions are in play when young, white students are faced with racial topics. Their efforts to make sense of contradictory perspectives, competing and convoluted feelings and expanding world views may be at the heart of actions and attitudes that have previously been described as simply 'resistant.' While these research findings represent the views of a small group of students, further research in this area may well be warranted.

This study further confirmed the findings of several researchers in some areas and contradicts the work of others. As previously stated, Banks, (1999) asserted that "students come to school with negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about different racial and ethnic groups." This study has certainly confirmed his argument as the participants spoke of the key influences on their racial perspectives and outlooks. Although many of the participants expressed that they accepted all people regardless of race, several students admitted to feelings of prejudice and bigotry about those who were racially different. The participants report these feelings as long held and point to their early experiences with family and media as key.

Kransdorf (2005) wrote of pre-service teachers' "lack of experience and understanding of other perspectives and viewpoints," and their tendency to view race as "historical" and holding little relevance in contemporary society. The interviews certainly highlighted Kransdorf's assertions as the participants spoke about their inexperience and confusion with perspectives different from those learned while they were growing up. This revelation, however, contradicts the arguments by demographers such as Howe and Strauss (2000) and writers such as Chideya, (1999), who assert that students of "the Millennial generation," having extensive exposure to those who are racially different and

having witnessed racial progress since they were children, do not generally struggle with racial understanding as have previous generations. Howe and Strauss' arguments that technological advances and a demographic boom have made the world much smaller and more multicultural for this generation, seem only partially correct. At issue, according to Broido, (2004), is that a demographic boom and advanced technology "does not necessarily translate to increased group contact." This study confirms that these participants are not necessarily utilizing increased numbers and technology to advance their interactions with those who are racially different on more than a superficial level.

As for how white students talk about race, this study corroborated the work of Walsh, (2007), Landsman, (2001), Gay, (2000), Tatum, (1997), and others who note that if whites in general and white students in particular speak about race at all, they do so reluctantly and often with fear, guilt and shame. As Tatum noted, the concern that white students feel about saying something that might appear "stupid, hurtful or offensive," participants in this study confirmed those feelings and more. Although many student participants spoke of their desire to engage in racial interactions, the fear of embarrassment or offense as well as lack of knowledge and prior experience prevented them from doing so.

While the study both confirmed and contradicted the findings posited by previous researchers, it also extended the research by focusing specifically on the racial experiences of pre-service teachers *before* they enrolled in their multicultural education courses. In addition, this study attempted to look beyond current scholarship which examines pre-service teachers as resistant and to begin the process of attempting to understand the complexities they bring with them to multicultural education courses.

This approach raises a number of questions to consider for further research.

1) If this study was to be extended on a much larger scale, would the findings be similar?

2) What specific conditions are necessary to help pre-service teachers honestly delve into discussions of race and racial experiences?

3) To what extent do the qualities of the facilitator influence the depth of information elicited from the participants?

4) What other methods might be used to do additional research focused on the psychological/social/emotional pressures pre-service teachers face?

5) How do we explain the continued optimism of the student participants in the face of their complex feelings about race?

Implications for Practice

While this study lends itself to further research inquiry, there are a number of

practical implications as well. In an effort to provide pre-service teachers with more

comprehensive training for their future classrooms, these practical questions are raised.

1) How can we adequately fill in the educational gap about people of color for our pre-service teachers?

2) How can we create experiences for pre-service teachers that encourages them to more deeply engage in racial dialogue as part of their multicultural education classes?

3) In our practice, should we give more consideration to the experiential and emotional complexities of pre-service teachers as they enter into multicultural education classes?

4) Is there a way to devote more time to dialogue that centers around race within multicultural education classes? Would some kind of lab attached to the course fill this need?

5) How can we include time for pre-service teachers to conduct greater self-reflection, to explore their experiences and attitudes about race?

6) How can we provide pre-service teachers with time to 'practice' potential racial dialogue with their future students or parents; to listen to others and to speak for themselves about racial issues and scenarios they may face in their future classrooms?

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to provide insight into the challenges facing young white pre-service teachers' issues and experiences with race. With the background provided by multicultural researchers and the insights presented by the student participants themselves, I hope this project contributes to and expands our work within the field. Pre-service teachers already face the daunting task of preparing for their academic areas, as well as concerns of classroom management and their own professional development. Add concerns about the challenges of preparing for their diverse classrooms and it is clear that pre-service students face major challenges. It is the hope of this researcher that we begin to pay more attention to the experiences, complexities and competing perspectives about race that pre-service teachers bring with them to their multicultural education courses. Given the vital importance of the title 'teacher,' it is critical to understand the difficult tasks these young pre-service teachers face as they receive their training. It is just as important for us as researchers and practitioners to find a way to help them turn their optimism about their future multicultural classrooms into a reality.

APPENDIX
Interview Questions

The Student

1) Please state your pseudonym, academic year and academic major here at Iowa.

2) How would you describe your race or ethnicity ?

3) Please state where you live when not in school.

    a) Were you raised there or in another location?

4) How would you describe the community where you grew up?

5) Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities here at school?

6) Please describe your career plans upon graduation.

    a) If planning to teach, what grade level is your preference?

    b) What subjects would you prefer to teach?

    c) What geographic area will you choose to begin your career after college?

Their Views

7) **What kinds of racial knowledge and experience would you bring to your classroom?**

    a) Have you had any kind of personal experiences with those who are racially different from you?

    b) Did you feel a sense of comfort within these experiences?

    c) Do you think you learned anything from these experiences?

    d) Have you been exposed to concepts such as white privilege or racial identity development theory prior to the multicultural education class?

8) **How do you define or characterize race and racism? (e.g. race = affirmative action or reverse discrimination; race = black/white; racism ≠ me, etc.).**

    a) Do you have a conception of racism that acknowledges and distinguishes between personal and institutional racism?

    b) Are you familiar with the concepts of "white privilege" or "racial identity development?"

    c) What are your beliefs and attitudes on race and racism? (e.g. 'Live and let live,' 'we're all the same,' 'we should stay separate,' 'everyone should go back to their own country,' etc.).

    d) What factors helped to shape these concepts?

    e) Does talking about racism make you uncomfortable? Please explain.

9) **Do you have experience discussing issues of race?**

    a) With family or friends? With members of a different race?

b) If so, would you consider these discussions to be meaningful?

c) Did you feel a sense of comfort or discomfort while having these discussions?

d) Would you feel comfortable initiating a discussion on race with someone of your own race? Someone of a different race?

e) Are you concerned about being "politically correct" when conversing with those racially different from you?

The Future

10) **What is your attitude and concerns about teaching students in the future who may be racially different from themselves?**

a) Are you anxious?

b) Fearful?

c) Confident?

d) Indifferent?

e) Do they believe that 'students are students' and should be treated the same?

11) **What kinds of knowledge do you believe would be helpful for you (in the areas of race) before you enter your own classroom?**

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