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Sociocultural Influences on Undergraduate Students' Conversations on Race at a Predominantly White Institution

Sherri Ivy Edvalson
University of Iowa

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SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS'
CONVERSATIONS ON RACE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

Sherri Ivy Edvalson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Counseling, Rehabilitation, and Student Development
(Student Affairs Administration and Research)
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Sherry K. Watt

Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

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

Sherri Ivy Edvalson

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Counseling, Rehabilitation, and Student Development (Student Affairs Administration and Research) at the August 2013 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Sherry K. Watt, Thesis Supervisor

Debora L. Liddell

Ernest T. Pascarella

Leslie A. Baxter

Christopher C. Morphew

To Harriet Cunningham
Fierce social justice advocate and my beloved Nana

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the sociocultural influences on dialogues about race of undergraduate students from various racial backgrounds at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This qualitative study included 16 undergraduate students from various racial backgrounds at a small, private university in the Midwest who participated in semi-structured focus group interviews. A data analysis addressed how the interplay of narratives and counter-narratives within dialogues on race revealed common themes within the framework of Critical Race Theory. Findings from the interview data suggest that race does not occur solely in the moment of a particular conversation or incidence. Rather, there are three sociocultural influences on undergraduates' conversations on race: The collective history related to race in the United States, students' personal experiences related to race, particularly discrimination, and the way they describe themselves as racial beings. Findings also revealed the possible benefits of providing spaces for students from various racial backgrounds to engage in dialogues on the construct of race.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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 socially, even while it remains largely a matter of biological and genetic irrelevance.

Tim Wise, *White Like Me*

As college campuses in the United States become more racially diverse, college student affairs administrators are confronted with positive and negative group interactions about race on an almost daily basis. In the 2012-13 academic year, several campuses experienced racial incidences that highlight some of the persistent issues surrounding race in college. Consider the following examples: A student leader wrote a letter to Chancellor Rita Cheng about the negative experiences of African-American students at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale after racist graffiti were discovered on a campus greenhouse last fall (Hale, 2012). An African-American female student at the University of California, Irvine, found a note in her backpack that said, “Go back 2 Africa, slave” a month after a fraternity at the same campus released a video of a White student performing in black face (Dobruck, 2013). Racial and homophobic slurs were written on a popular campus bridge at the University of Virginia (McCance, 2013). In February, 2013, Oberlin College officials cancelled classes following reports of the n-word written across several Black History Month posters hanging in the campus Science Center, swastikas drawn on campus buildings, “Whites Only” written above a water fountain in a residence hall, and “No [n-word]s” written above a bathroom door (Perez-Pena & Gabriel, 2013).

Approaches to dialogue in the wake of racial incidences on campus such as the events described above range from written statements of apology from presidents or other officials to engaging in formal dialogues on the specific incident or the larger issue of racial diversity. The prevailing goal of this type of dialogue has been to provide an

apology on behalf of the dominant group to the individual victim and the target group of which that individual is a member (Bartlett, 2000; Carnevale, 2003). These strategies are necessary but insufficient for addressing the larger issue of race and racism on the American college campus.

In the United States, expressions of race and incidents of racism have a historical context. Ideas and values that are associated with being White hold more power over ideas and values associated with the minority and with people of color (Reason & Broido, 2005). This system creates a way of relating where racial minorities are the target of prejudice, discrimination, and marginalization and the majority racial group reaps the advantages of benefits, elevated status, and centralized focus. Our perceptions of difference based on race are tied to our perceptions of, and experiences with, power and privilege versus oppression and marginalization based on race. Experiences with power and privilege or oppression and marginalization are one aspect of the larger concept of sociocultural influences on the way individuals make meaning of their lives. Sociocultural influences are the practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others that inform the way an individual lives and makes meaning of his or her experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

Researchers on college students suggest that engaging in dialogues on issues such as race and racism can also be associated with positive outcomes of college (Gurin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2006). College student development theorists have conducted research on cross-racial interactions among college students and argue that engaging in dialogues on diversity issues such as race can enhance these interactions (Astin, 1993; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayak, 2007). Current research on college students also demonstrates that students who engage in discussions on diverse issues such as race, with peers that are different from them, show increases in measures such as openness to diversity, and are more likely to believe that racism is still an issue in contemporary society (Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). Research also exists on various models of conducting dialogues on race (Nagda & Zuniga, 2003; Goodman, 1995; Watt, 2009; Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sands, & Osuna, 2009). These approaches provide supportive findings for the positive outcomes associated with dialogues on race in the college setting.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the sociocultural influences on dialogues about race of undergraduate students from various racial backgrounds at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This study analyzed how the interplay of narratives and counter-narratives within dialogues on race reveal sociocultural influences.

Research Question

The research question is: What are the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogues about race at a Predominantly White Institution?

Overview of Methods and Theoretical Framework

Methods

The present study was qualitative in nature and used semi-structured focus groups to elicit personal stories about the ways in which the participants made meaning of race. Undergraduate students at a small, private, religious-affiliated university in the Midwest were invited to participate in a focus group to talk about race. The sample included sixteen undergraduates from various racial backgrounds. The documentary, *A Place at the Table* (Hudson, 2000), was used as a stimulus to frame the conversations on race. This documentary contains personal narratives of college students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds as they describe their racial ancestry and their family's place within the ideology of the American Dream. The interview protocol included asking students to react to the narratives in the film and to describe their experiences with race. I conducted a thematic analysis to identify common themes related to the sociocultural influences on their dialogues about race and analyzed them in the context of Critical Race Theory. Next, I provide an introduction to Critical Race Theory, the theoretical frame for my analysis.

Theoretical framework

One theory that attempts to address the persistence of race and racism as an issue confronting college students today is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory maintains that race and racism are persistent and pervasive issues in contemporary society. Critical race scholars critically examine the relationships among race, power, and privilege. Some of the basic assumptions of Critical Race Theory are that race continues to influence inequality in the United States, that U.S. society is based on property rights and the disproportionate ownership of both intellectual and physical property by White people, and that studying race can help scholars to understand how educational inequity is a part of the larger racial inequality present in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The practical goal of Critical Race Theory within the higher education setting is to provide spaces for students from both marginalized and dominant groups to share stories and counter-stories of experiences with race to illuminate the reality of race on campus and in the larger sociocultural context.

Critical race theorists have analyzed students' stories and counter-stories as a means to more fully understand the sociocultural influences on their understanding of race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Parker, 2010). Using Critical Race Theory as an approach to studying students' experiences with race can provide evidence of the persistent race-based inequalities on college campuses and in the larger society and can even attempt to subvert the dominant group's representation of reality (Delgado, 1989). Understanding that the incidences surrounding race have historical, experiential, and identity influences can contribute to a greater understanding of the context that is the history that students bring to the table when engaging in conversations on race.

Conclusion

Conducting research on the sociocultural influences on dialogues about race, as it relates to the experiences of dominant and marginalized groups, has the potential to inform the way that students approach the reality of race and racism as a relevant issue on campus and in society, and can help student affairs practitioners facilitate more meaningful dialogues on race. Understanding more about sociocultural influences can help illuminate approaches to race and racism on campus rather than as isolated reactions to racially motivated incidents on campus and in society.

Study Terms and Definitions

Counter-story: A type of narrative, told through the voice of an individual who has been historically silenced, in an effort to share their experiences with race (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). For the purposes of this study, counter-stories are those narratives shared by students who identify with one or more minority races.

Dialogue: A set of discourses, or systems of meaning, that include multiple, independent beliefs and values (Baxter, 2011).

Difficult dialogue: A “verbal or written exchange of ideas or opinions between citizens within a community that centers on an awakening of potentially conflicting views of beliefs or values about social justice issues (such as racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism/homophobia)” (Watt, 2007, p. 116).

Oppression: Relationships of dominance and subordination in which the dominant group benefits from the systematic abuse and injustice toward the subordinate group (Bell, 2007).

Participants: This study included undergraduate, U.S. citizen or permanent resident, students, for the population of interest.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): A college or university where the majority race of students, faculty, and staff is White (Willie, 2003).

Race: A system of categories that define individuals on the basis of physical and genetic traits such as skin color. Race is the central construct of inquiry for the present study. Because the actual, physiological differences between various races are minimal, perceptions of difference are constructed in the society in which we live. Thus, for the purposes of this study, race is a social construction (Tatum, 1994; 2007).

Social oppression: An extension of the definition of oppression that assumes all members of the dominant and subordinate group participate in the relationship whereby dominant group members benefit from the abuse and injustices toward the subordinate group, *regardless of individual attitudes and behaviors* (Bell, 2007).

Sociocultural influences: Practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others that inform the way an individual lives and makes meaning of his or her experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). For the purposes of the present study, students' practices, beliefs, values, and interactions related to race is the primary sociocultural influence on their conversations on race.

Storytelling: Describing individual experiences in one's own voice. Storytelling, for the purposes of this study, refers to participants narrating their experiences with race. This method of data collection allows minority students to share "counter-stories" that have traditionally not been heard in higher education settings while majority students' stories are shared in an effort to analyze, challenge, and expose the master narrative" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Undergraduate student: A student pursuing his/her baccalaureate degree.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature will outline aspects of the college student experience in the United States that contribute to a better understanding of the way that students make meaning of race within the college environment, how the practices, beliefs, ideas, and interactions with others contributes to their identity development, and how those things influence their conversations on race. I begin with an exploration of Critical Race Theory and its utility in describing the persistence of race and racism as issues for today's college student. Next, I describe how the campus climate for diversity provides a context for students' experiences related to race. I describe how students develop as racial beings by describing research on White and Black/Multiple Race identity development. I complete the review by describing some approaches to dialogues that informed my desire to conduct research on the sociocultural influences on the way students talk about race.

The purpose of this study was to examine the sociocultural influences on dialogues on race of undergraduate students of various racial backgrounds at a Predominantly White Institution. Persistent incidences related to race and racism on college campuses in the United States call for the need to gather more information on the ways that students talk about race. Research on college students has explored their experiences with race, the extent to which they feel included in the campus community and the feelings of isolation and exclusion that many minority students have reported as part of their college experience. Conducting research that addresses how the meaning of race is constructed in students' dialogues can address how individuals from a variety of racial backgrounds approach the idea of race and illuminate the sociocultural influences that inform these ideas. The present study adds to the current body of research on race by adding information that will help scholars and practitioners ascertain a deeper understanding of the sociocultural influences of dialogues on race.

Previous studies have focused on various aspects of the college student experience as it relates to race, including the racial diversity climate (Hurtado, 1999; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008; Clayton-Pedersen, et. al., 2007; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005), students' perceptions of race (Hochschild, 1995; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakani, & Hodson, 2002; Brunner, 2006), and various aspects of dialogues on diversity topics such as race. However, this study addresses the need to conduct research that critically analyzes how students have conversations on race. This research is relevant to the primary research question: What are the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogues about race at a Predominantly White Institution?

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one approach for studying students' experiences with race and highlights the persistence of racism in contemporary society. Critical Race Theory originated from the field of law in the post-Civil Rights era and has gained momentum in education settings since the 1990s (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars in higher education have used Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to give voice to students whose college experiences have been marked by isolation, marginalization, or oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The goal of this type of research has been to provide a counter-narrative to the dominant story of the college experience as one that includes the majority, often at the expense of the minority student.

Scholars who study Critical Race Theory have used it to examine the relationship of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2006) presented a useful summary of the common understanding of Critical Race Theory as it has evolved in the last decade in the first edition of their book on the theory. First, the theory assumes that racism is systemic in nature. Rather than simply being isolated incidences, racism is the common, everyday experience of people of color. Second, racism has benefits for members of the dominant group and, as a result, provides

little incentive to change. Third, race, and the way that racism is played out in everyday experiences of both dominant and marginalized groups, is a product of social interactions, behaviors, and values. Critical Race Theory's fourth assumption is that storytelling, or giving voice to individuals who have been previously silenced can contribute to the empowerment of marginalized individuals and the consciousness-raising of individuals from the dominant group.

Ladson-Billings and Tate describe the storytelling aspect of Critical Race Theory as "the naming of one's own reality" (1995, 56). When students who identify as a member of a minority group exchange stories with members of the dominant group, they not only reveal the reality of oppression, but also help to reframe the reality constructed by White students that has been informed by systemic racism. This type of story is known as counter-narrative, or telling stories that present another reality against that which has been told by the dominant group and presented as a universal experience. In this way, members of both subordinate and dominant groups can engage in consciousness-raising on matters related to race.

Research related to Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is a relatively new way to explore college student development and experiences. Qualitative research that has been conducted in the last twenty years has focused on learning more about students' experiences in college through the use of narrative. One of the early studies to apply Critical Race Theory in the higher education setting was conducted in 1992 with Black/African-American students, faculty, and administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (Feagin, 1992). Twenty-four Black/African-American students, faculty members, and administrators were interviewed in fourteen campuses across the United States. Feagin identified a primary barrier to Black/African American students feelings of inclusion on the predominantly White campus. This barrier was negative attitudes displayed by White students, faculty, administrators, and alumni. The impact of these negative experiences with each of the

four barrier groups was what Feagin coined, “cumulative discrimination” (1992, 573). The participants in this study described the campus climate as one where the White experience was presented as the norm.

Nearly 10 years later, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) interviewed 34 African-American students in ten focus groups at three Predominantly White Institutions. This qualitative study echoed many of Feagin’s findings, highlighting marginalization, assumptions about the students’ academic ability, and lowered expectations by their teachers and peers (2000). The researchers found that the students experience racial microaggressions on their respective campuses. Racial microaggressions are subtle, often unconscious acts of racism (Sue, 1997). The students in the study described instances of racial microaggressions in the classroom setting where they reported feeling invisible and being ignored by professors and peers. The students also felt invisible in non-classroom academic spaces including the library and departmental offices as well as in study groups with White peers. Additionally, participants in the study described feeling that there were two sets of rules and social norms for social spaces on campus—one for the White students and another for the Black/African-American students. The latter set of rules was more stringent and based on an unconscious suspicion of African-American students on the part of campus police and other campus officials.

The result of feeling marginalized in both academic and social spaces on campus had negative effects on students’ feelings of belonging, self-efficacy, and academic ability. Some reported dropping classes or changing majors as a result of feeling isolated and ignored in their classes and other academic spaces. Solorzano and colleagues suggested that student affairs create counter spaces as a refuge from microaggressions and feelings of isolation on a predominantly White campus. Counter spaces can include African-American theme housing in the residence halls, multicultural organizations, and Black/African-American student study groups. These suggestions can mitigate the effects of minority students’ feelings of isolation and marginalization on a predominantly White

campus, but do not necessarily address the larger issue of transforming campus climates into positive spaces for students from all racial identities.

In 1998, Solorzano used Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework for a study of six Chicano and six Chicana graduate student recipients of the Ford Foundation fellowship and their experiences with racial and gender microaggressions. Students in the study reported feeling isolated and invisible on their predominantly White campuses, and encountering lower expectations than their non-Chicano/a peers. Even though this study's participants were graduate students, their experiences are similar to that of other research with undergraduate students, suggesting that the overall themes of isolation, lowered expectations, and experiences with racial microaggressions transcend the progression through educational levels and provide further evidence of the pervasive nature of racism in higher education settings.

Theory and Research on Racial Diversity Climate

Understanding the way students make meaning of race requires a better understanding of the various elements that make up their college environment. The college environment is made up of the characteristics of its members and their surroundings (Strange & Banning, 2001). One element of the campus environment is the climate for racial diversity. The experiences of minority students in higher education suggest that the “cumulative discrimination” that Feagin suggested in his 1992 study has implications for the overall campus climate for diversity. Colleges and universities in the United States have made strides to improve structural diversity—the presence of a critical mass of underrepresented minority students—through affirmative action and other minority enrollment and retention initiatives (Milem, 2003). Scholars and policy-makers have established that increasing structural diversity is an important first step in building a positive campus racial diversity climate (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005) and that interactions with diverse others enhances students' overall success (Gurin, 1999).

Theory related to racial diversity climate

The campus racial diversity climate contains several elements that have an impact on educational outcomes (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). The campus climate framework includes *historical, structural, psychological, and behavioral* elements that inform the institutional context for diversity (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Each of these elements has an impact on the way that members of the campus community interact with one another in and out of the classroom. Within this framework, a campus climate for diversity is considered *positive* if it has a critical mass of faculty, staff, and students who identify as members of a minority race, experiences and issues related to minority groups is infused in the academic curriculum, programs are in place to ensure equity in recruitment, retention, and persistence to graduation for minority students, and a university mission and vision that includes a commitment to diversity. Each of the four elements of the campus climate framework contributes to the overall campus climate for diversity.

The historical element includes those events in United States history that left a legacy of including members of the majority race in higher education while excluding members of racial minorities. Landmark social events such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and The Civil Rights Movement resulted in legislation and social practices that shaped the racial demographics of college and university campuses (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). The structural element includes the policies that inform the curriculum, hiring practices, tenure and reward systems, budget allocations, and decision-making practices that influence the diversity climate. The psychological element includes perceptions of racial/ethnic tension, discrimination, and the ways in which attitudes and prejudices are enacted on campus. Finally, the behavioral element includes cross-racial social interactions, the degree of intra-racial and cross-racial campus involvement, and pedagogical approaches to diversity.

Research on racial diversity climate

In a summary of racial diversity climate studies from 1992 to 2007, Harper and Hurtado (2007) began with a discussion of the most widely cited campus racial climate study to date. In 1992, Hurtado conducted an analysis of campus racial climates using longitudinal data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman and follow-up surveys for the 1985 first-time, full-time student cohort, including those attending 116 Predominantly White Institutions. Hurtado suggested that general social conflict, including racial issues, influence students' perceptions of the racial diversity climate. Hurtado's analysis found that one-third of the students perceived "considerable racial conflict" on their campuses (p. 551) and that Black students reported higher levels of racial tension and lower perceived levels of institutional commitment to diversity than any other racial group included in the study.

Harper and Hurtado's (2007) review focused on the racial climate studies conducted after Hurtado's 1992 report. In their summary of twenty-six climate studies, they reported that students' perceptions of the racial diversity climate varied by race, students of color often perceived their campus environments as racist, and reported incidents of prejudicial treatment (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cabrera et al., 1999; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Radloff & Evans, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005). They reported that climates focusing on the behavioral element of the campus diversity climate, particularly fostering cross-racial engagement, resulted in benefits for all students. This review provides further information for the need to analyze how students talk about race, and how the practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others influence how they make meaning of race for themselves and in conversations with others.

After completing their review of racial climate studies, Harper and Hurtado conducted a multi-institutional, qualitative study of campus racial climates at five Predominantly White Institutions to explore how contemporary student cohorts

experience campus racial climates (2007) and to add to the body of research on college students' experiences with race. Each of the research sites had reported challenges with race and racism prior to the study. Among the themes they identified from their student interviews was the idea that race was a "four-letter word" and that race-related conversations occurred infrequently on their campuses (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 16). White student participants tended to believe that non-White students were as satisfied with the campus climate as they were, while Black students at every research site reported the highest degree of dissatisfaction with the campus racial climate. Additionally, students from all racial groups reported that Harper and Hurtado's study was the first time that anyone had engaged in a dialogue about the way that race played out in their lives on campus.

At the conclusion of their study, Harper and Hurtado (2007) noted that the presence of racial tensions on the participating campuses were similar to those from the studies they reviewed from the 1980s through 2005. It is noteworthy that the researchers in this study also noted a continued lack of dialogue on race-related issues among students, faculty, staff, and administrators at the research sites. Harper and Hurtado suggested further research on ways to facilitate meaningful dialogues on race, adding to the need to gather more information on how students talk about race.

Theory related to student perceptions of racial diversity climate

Studies that include students from various racial backgrounds have highlighted race-based differences in students' perceptions of campus climate. Students' perceptions of campus climate are shaped by their pre-college practices, traditions, beliefs, and values, and interactions with others in their communities and schools. Implicit and explicit forms of racism that are found in everyday attitudes and interactions with others also shape these perceptions. These implicit, everyday attitudes and interactions are known as aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Gaertner et al.,

1997). Dovidio and Gaertner developed the Theory of Aversive Racism as a way to describe the ways in which members of the majority race avoid interactions with racial minorities because of their negative beliefs or attitudes toward these groups (1986). This theory provides a contrast to practices of overt racism, which are characterized by hatred and discrimination against racial minorities that is often more readily identified when enacted on individuals or groups. Aversive racism is a subtle, yet more complex form of racism and is also informed by an individual's practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others in their communities and schools.

Research on student perceptions of racial diversity climate

In a study of 5,000 students at 93 institutions, Chang found a statistically significant difference between White and non-White entering students' viewpoints on social issues (2002). White students, for example, were the least likely to view racial discrimination as a problem in the United States at the time they entered college. Other studies explored White students' perceptions of the role of history in current campus climate. In a qualitative study with 89 White students, Gallagher (2003) found that students discounted the idea that slavery plays a role in the lives of Black Americans in contemporary society.

In a second qualitative study with seventeen focus groups with primarily White students, Gallagher (2004) found that while students acknowledged racism as an issue in the past, they did not believe that racial discrimination presented barriers to educational opportunity in contemporary society. In a mixed-method study of White students, Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000). found that when talking about racism, students defined it as a personal issue, rather than being a systemic problem. Additionally, students in the quantitative portion of the study reported that racism and discrimination no longer affected the lives of racial minorities. In all three studies, Gallagher and Bonilla-Silva and

Forman concluded that students' beliefs informed how they felt about current policy and practice related to race.

In other studies, White student participants reported that participating in a research study was the first time they had thought about the idea of the racial diversity climate at their college. For example, Brunner's (2006) study of student perceptions of diversity found that White students most often defined diversity in terms of "differences in culture" (p. 312), rather than making racial distinctions. Other studies have found that the majority of Whites view Blacks as being equal to, or faring better than Whites (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakani, & Hodson, 2002), while Blacks perceive racial discrimination to affect all aspects of their lives (Hochschild, 1995). This body of research demonstrates the possible influence of students' precollege practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others on their beliefs about and approaches to diversity on campus but leaves room for a closer examination of the sociocultural influences on dialogues on race.

Racial Identity Development

College student development theory

Students' experiences with race on college campuses occur within the context of their development as racial beings. Racial identity development is one aspect of student psychosocial development theory. Psychosocial identity development theories frame the way students define and express the self in their environment. Many identity models are inspired by the work of Erik Erickson (1968), who presented the development of self as a series of identity crises that occur most intensely in adolescence. Racial identity development models help students make meaning of their lives as racial beings. Their practices, values, beliefs, and interactions with others shape how they make meaning of race and contribute to their overall racial identity development. Because the research question for the present study addresses the social and cultural influences on the way

students make meaning of race, it is relevant to introduce and explore a few of the significant racial identity models in the field of college student development.

Theory related to White racial identity development

White Identity Development (Hardiman, 1982) and White Racial Identity Development (Helms, 1984) were both developed as theories to focus attention on the experiences and development of the dominant group, to address the systems of power and privilege based on race, and to promote self-awareness among White individuals (Ponterotto, 1988). White identity development theories were developed alongside the concept of Whiteness. Whiteness includes dimensions that are parallel to the constructs of discrimination and oppression—individual, institutional, and socio-cultural (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

The White Identity Development model (WID) was developed in response to the prevailing research at the time that focused on “the other” when studying issues of race, rather than looking at the White individual and White culture and its role in sustaining a system of privilege. The White Racial Identity Development (WRID) model was conceived in response to the current model of research in counseling psychology that had framed the White person as the “therapist” and the racial minority as the “client” or person in need of help (Helms, 1984; Helms & Cook, 1999). Both theories formed the foundation for a new way of approaching racial theory that focused on White people not only as racial beings, but also as active participants in a system of advantage based on race.

Hardiman’s model of White Identity Development includes five stages: *naïveté*, *acceptance*, *resistance*, *redefinition*, and *internalization*. In the *naïveté* stage, Whites have little to no understanding of what it means to be a racial being, and the values attached to being a member of a certain race. By the end of childhood, Whites move to the next stage, *acceptance*, which includes an acceptance of racism and the idea that Whites are the superior race. This acceptance can be conscious or unconscious, but it is

most often unconscious. The next stage, *resistance*, involves questioning White dominance and begins to try to unravel the ways in which they have been programmed to accept White as dominant. *Redefinition* occurs when the White person begins to take responsibility for the role that Whites play in the current system of racism and begins to accept the self as a White and White culture. Finally, *internalization* occurs when the White person is conscious of his or her race and can integrate Whiteness into his or her daily life.

Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model (WRID) is a seven-stage theory that includes *contact*, *disintegration*, *reintegration*, *pseudo-independence*, *immersion*, *emersion*, and *autonomy* (Helms & Cook, 1999). Students in the *contact* stage are oblivious to privilege and often either avoid or deny it when confronted with the issue. *Disintegration* brings guilt and a moral dilemma and may result in the individual embracing White ideology as a way to cope with the guilt. The *reintegration* stage is characterized by intolerance toward non-White racial groups and the desire to protect one's privilege. Individuals in the *reintegration* stage often act out of anger and fear. The *pseudo-independence* stage is marked by acknowledging the responsibility that Whites have for past and present racism. Individuals in this stage begin the search for a new White identity and may become dissatisfied with other Whites rather than looking inward. *Immersion* and *emersion* are characterized by searching for accurate information about race and a deeper understanding of racist socialization and embracing a community of reeducated Whites to empower the self as a White being. Finally, the *autonomy* stage includes an unwillingness to participate in oppression and the capacity to relinquish White privilege in favor of a more just society for all racial groups.

Other scholars have derived similar models, including Ponterotto's exploration of White counselor trainees (1988), and Sue's (Sue, et. al.,1998) descriptive model of White individual's movement from conformity to White, ethnocentric norms to the development of a non-racist White identity. Each of these models, particularly when considered

alongside psychosocial development, can help White students navigate their college experience in terms of their role in societal oppression (Pope, 2000).

Theory related to Black and multiracial identity development

In the years following the Civil Rights Movement, researchers started thinking about how Black individuals shaped their identity from the social, historical, and political perspectives of the time. The Nigrescence Model (Cross, 1971) and Black Identity Development (Jackson, 1976; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992) were the two primary Black identity development models to arise from this period. Both models responded to the reshaping of what it meant to be a Black person in the sociocultural context of the United States (Jackson, 2001). These theories were a unique departure from classic psychosocial developmental models in that they helped the Black individual make sense of his or her “Blackness” and helped people in the majority race make sense of the societal unrest that occurred in the 1960s and 70s in the United States (Jackson, 2001, p. 9).

Jackson’s Black Identity Development model, as updated by Hardiman and Jackson in 1992, is marked by five stages of consciousness related to one’s identity: *naive, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization*. The stages are also marked by transitions, or *entry* and *exit* from one stage to another. In the naive stage, the individual has little to no awareness of the self as a racial being. This is in early childhood, where there may be awareness of physical differences, but not necessarily a feeling of inferiority or hostility. Individuals transition from *naïve* to *acceptance* by learning and adopting the ideology of their own and other races. The adopted ideology about Blacks is that they are “less than” and White is the “normal” race (Jackson, 2001, p. 19). Individuals move through *acceptance* with the notion that White is the accepted, normalized race and to be other than White is to be inferior. Transitioning from *acceptance* to *resistance* includes a heightened awareness of the ongoing injustices acted out on Black people and an examination of the individual’s role in the victimization of their race. Individuals in the *resistance* stage begin to understand race and racism as a

complex issue, raises questions, and begins to feel empowered. The next stage, *redefinition*, is marked by the individual focusing his or her attention on other Black people in the same stage. The individual redefining the self as an empowered, racial being characterizes the final stage, internalization.

Cross' Theory of Nigrescence (1971, 1991) is also a five-stage model that marks the process of forming a Black identity: *pre-encounter*, *encounter*, *immersion-emersion*, *internalization*, and *internalization-commitment*. Much like Jackson's model, individuals in Cross' model move from being unaware of the self as a racial being (*pre-encounter*) to the first memories of being viewed as different from the majority (*encounter*). In the next stages, individuals become *immersed* in their own cultural practices and associates only with other Black individuals and then moves to *emersion* where he or she may adopt aspects of other racial customs and characteristics and also becomes more comfortable with members of other races. The final stages, *internalization* and *internalization-commitment* are marked by one's comfort with both the self as a racial being and others of different races as well as the empowerment to commit to a just racial world. Cross revised his theory in 1991 and 1995 to adapt to the changing social, cultural, and political landscape in which Black individuals develop their identity. Cross also introduced the idea of "race salience" to describe the degree to which an individual held race as important to his or her identity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

While the previous theories provide insight into specific racial identity development, the experiences of individuals who identify as one or more race require yet another approach to conceiving of the self as a racial being. Multiracial identity development is similar to White and Black identity models in that the individual moves through stages of development related to race. Poston's (1990) model of Biracial Identity Development is similar to both Jackson (1976) and Cross' (1971) models in that the individual moves from a sense of naiveté about his or her race to a sense of the self as a racial being. Poston's model involves a series of choices at each stage whereby he or she

identifies with a particular aspect of the racial self and ultimately feels a sense of appreciation for his or her racial heritage. Kich's Model of Biracial and Bicultural Identity (1992) begins with an *awareness of difference* and culminates in a self-determined biracial identity with the ability to move between the two racial groups.

Wijeyesinghe criticized these models for framing multiracial as a single group onto which one model can be superimposed and developed another model of "racial identity in multiracial people" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 136). Wijeyesinghe's Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (1992) was developed from a qualitative study of Black/African-American, White/Non-Hispanic, and multiracial adults. The eight factors in this model include *racial ancestry, early experiences and socialization, cultural attachment, physical appearance, social and historical context, political awareness and orientation, other social identities, and spirituality*. The factors are interrelated and each has an influence on one's racial identity formation.

Dialogues on Race

Students' prior practices, values, beliefs, and interactions with diverse others influence the way they perceive the campus racial diversity climate and their development as racial beings. These practices, values, beliefs, and interactions with diverse others also influences the extent to which they engage in conversations about race in the college setting. In their discussion of race and college students, Harper and Patton (2007) argue that it is possible for today's college students to graduate without ever having engaged in a conversation on race or racism. The result is a generation of college students who may unknowingly or knowingly perpetuate racism on campus and in the larger communities they will enter upon graduation. Various models for conducting dialogues on issues such as race exist in higher education, and campus faculty, staff, and students have engaged in them with varying degrees of success.

Models related to dialogues on race

Researchers have outlined ways to facilitate and sustain dialogues on issues such as race in and out of the classroom (Nagda & Zuniga, 2003; Blum, 2000; Goodman, 1995). Intergroup dialogues are face-to-face interactions between members of two or more social identity groups with the goal of creating new levels of understanding, relating, and social action (Zuniga, 2003). Democratic dialogues are structured, facilitated discussions designed to explore complex social issues, the goal of which is empowerment and action (Rodin & Steinberg, 2003). Each of these approaches has the aim of having more authentic dialogues on potentially tension-filled and contradictory topics, including race.

Difficult dialogues attempt to illuminate students' understanding of issues such as race and racism. A difficult dialogue is a "verbal or written exchange of ideas or opinions that centers on an awakening of potentially conflicting views of beliefs or values about social justice issues" (Watt, 2007, p. 116). One focus of the difficult dialogue is to explore systems of privilege present when students from privileged identities talk about social justice issues. Watt developed a Privileged Identity Exploration theory to characterize students' resistance reactions when engaging in difficult dialogues.

Research related to dialogues on race

Watt and colleagues conducted a study of graduate students' reactions to dialogues on issues such as race (Watt, Curtis, Drummond, Kellogg, Lozano, Tagliapietra Nicoli, & Rosas, 2009). The study included White counselor education students at a Midwestern public research university. Although this study was conducted on graduate students, it is relevant to the present study because it examines how dialogue can be used to explore how students make meaning of issues such as race.

Watt and colleagues identified eight resistance reactions: *denial*, *deflection*, *rationalization*, *intellectualization*, *principlum*, *false envy*, *minimization*, and *benevolence*. Participants exhibited *denial* by suggesting that the problem did not exist. *Deflection* was

used as a defense when participants focused on a less threatening target when talking about the issue. Participants also used *rationalization* as a way to focus on a logical or rational, rather than the real reason behind their attitudes or beliefs. Students also called on *intellectualization*, or the calling upon of facts, to avoid exploration. *Principium* was identified as using one's personal or religious beliefs to avoid the topic at hand. *False envy* included feeling affection for an aspect of a person while not acknowledging the complexities of the person or group. Students *minimized* the issue when they reduced the magnitude of the issue to simple terms and displayed *benevolence*—an overly sensitive or charitable feeling toward the target group.

Of these defenses, Watt and colleagues found that *principium*, *false envy*, and *benevolence* were those reactions that were most likely the result of viewing the world from a position of privilege and having been insulated from the issues prior to exploring it in college. Watt and colleagues also found that these concepts were less prevalent in current literature on students' explorations of issues such as race and called for more in-depth research on students' reactions to difficult dialogues.

Results from intergroup dialogue studies have cited increased empathy for others, positive racial identity, and increased optimism for interracial interactions (Zuniga, 2003; Willow, 2008; Miller & Donner, 2000). In one study, intergroup dialogue was used as an intervention to discuss racial issues. Researchers found that students experienced positive outcomes, including increased comfort with communicating across differences and increased comfort in interracial situations (Werkmeister-Rozas, 2003).

Difficult dialogues on race have been used in classroom and focus group settings (Goodman, 1995; Young, 2003; Watt, 2009; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Researchers have focused on the experiences of students of color in difficult dialogues as well as White students. Sue and colleagues conducted focus groups with students of color to learn more about their reactions to racial microaggressions, or commonplace racial remarks directed at students of color (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo,

& Rivera, 2009). Participants in this study reported feeling that their White peers were reluctant to engage in honest dialogue about race and the students of color feared negative repercussions for initiating such conversations. Research on difficult dialogues among White students pointed to the various forms of resistance among privileged groups to difficult dialogues on topics including race and pointed to ways that student affairs practitioners can address resistance to help White students develop their diversity consciousness (Watt, 2007; 2009).

Democratic dialogues can also be used to address topics such as racism among college students. Unlike intergroup dialogue and difficult dialogues, the end result of a democratic dialogue may not be arriving at consensus, but does have a primary goal of understanding the importance and relevance of the conversation and acknowledging unique perspectives and shared values (Rodin & Steinberg, 2003). Democratic dialogues have been used to address the topic of racism following events such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Crocco & Grolnick, 2007) for audiences ranging from elementary, high school, and college students to community groups. Researchers and practitioners using democratic dialogues as a tool to talk about racism have reported that they contributed to easing tension between different racial groups, building trust in cross-racial settings, and enhancing interpersonal communication skills (Steele, 2010; Bucher, 2007).

Summary of Relevant Literature

Students from various racial backgrounds make meaning of race within the college environment and are informed by the practices, beliefs, values and interactions with others they had before coming to college. Their collective practices, beliefs, values, and interactions contribute to the college climate for diversity. The college racial diversity climate can inform the extent to which students develop an openness to diversity, commitment to social justice, and positive attitudes toward diverse others. The climate for diversity may also contribute to minority students' feelings of isolation and exclusion if the structural make-up is predominantly White. Understanding how students

from various racial backgrounds perceive the campus climate, and their attitudes and beliefs about diverse others provides evidence that informs how students engage in dialogues on issues such as race.

Racial identity models provide insight into how individuals make meaning of the self as a racial being as they navigate the college environment. Black individuals develop their sense of self as a Black individual and White individuals come to terms with their place in a system of privilege. Multiracial identity development helps individuals to discern their own sense of identity within the contexts of the multiple race perspectives that inform who they are. Each of these models takes into account the practices, values, behaviors, and interactions with others that inform how individuals make meaning of their lives and therefore have utility in addressing the research question in the present study.

This literature review examined the current research on Critical Race Theory, the campus climate for diversity, racial identity development, and models for conducting dialogues on diversity issues such as race. Current literature that explores students' perceptions of their campus climate or experiences on campus with diverse others may not provide a complete picture of the ways in which students make meaning of race. Studies in the past two decades using Critical Race Theory provide an alternative look at race on campus through the use of counter-narratives of the persistence of racism on campus today. These studies highlight the complexities of approaching race on campus and the need to conduct dialogue among students, while also attending to the practices, values, beliefs, behaviors, and interactions with others that influence the way they make meaning of race. There exists a need, however, to conduct further research on the students' experiences with race and the sociocultural influences on their dialogues on race in cross-racial settings.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogues about race at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). The study addressed the following research question: What are the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogues about race at a Predominantly White Institution? I used thematic analysis, within the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory, to describe the data in rich detail. This chapter discusses the study's research methods and includes discussion of the following: (a) rationale for qualitative critical approach, (b) researcher as a human instrument, (c) participant recruitment and selection, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) ethical considerations, and (g) limitations.

Rationale for the Qualitative Critical Approach

This study analyzed the sociocultural influences on the conversations between undergraduate about race. Researching the process of dialogue included identifying the practices, values, beliefs, and interactions with others that informed the way students made meaning of race. Applying a thematic analysis to undergraduates' dialogues about race allowed me to examine more precisely the sociocultural influences on the way they make meaning of race.

Identifying a theoretical framework

This question lent itself to a qualitative analysis of the relevant themes. To arrive at the most appropriate means by which to gather a rich description of the students' narratives on race, I researched various theoretical frames, including Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; 2001) and the theory of Dialogism (Bakhtin, 1984; Baxter, 2011) before arriving at Critical Race Theory for my final analysis and findings. I examined the theory and analytical method that accompanied Dialogism before determining that Critical Race Theory was the most appropriate frame. Next, I will

briefly describe Dialogism before describing the methods I used within the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory.

Dialogism

Dialogue, within the context of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogism, is a process by which individuals construct meaning, and where their words, phrases, and sentences (presented as utterances in dialogic theory) present sites of struggle among the individuals engaged in dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984; Baxter, 2011). Dialogues comprise discourses or systems of meaning that include multiple, interdependent beliefs and values (Baxter, 2011). In the critical realm of interpersonal communication, dialogue is a constitutive process of making sense of the world in which we live. Bakhtin described dialogue as a chain of utterances—words, phrases, or sentences that are punctuated by words that others speak—comprised of four links: proximal already-spoken, proximal not-yet-spoken, distal already-spoken, and distal not-yet-spoken. Proximal links on the chain answer or anticipate the response of the immediate others and are most often found in relational talk. Distal links comprise larger social and cultural influences and can be identified when individuals call on larger cultural discourses in their conversations. The distal links on the chain are of particular interest in research questions that examine cultural influences on dialogue. because it is where the cultural influences are most often found in dialogue (Baxter, 2011).

To analyze data within the dialogic framework, researchers use a process called contrapuntal analysis. Contrapuntal analysis is a type of discourse analysis whose name comes from the musical term “contrapuntal,” or the playing of contrasting melodies. This method focuses on “the interplay of competing discourses (i.e., systems of meaning, points of view, world views) in spoken or written texts” (Baxter, 2011, p. 152). The goal of contrapuntal analysis is to find those places in the dialogue that are sites of dialogic struggle—where certain discourses are privileged while others are pushed to the margin of the participants' talk. This method is useful for identifying those places where

individuals privilege culturally-specific values, ideas, and interactions. Contrapuntal analysis allows researchers to apply a micro-analytic lens to data and to identify those systems of meaning that are central to a particular dialogue. Analyzing the utterance chain with contrapuntal analysis requires examining the dialogues as the unit of analysis in order to understand the interplay of discourses within each communication setting. After becoming familiar with the data, the steps of which I describe below, I determined that the most appropriate unit of analysis would be the individual stories rather than the interplay of utterances within each focus group. As a result, I explored other critical approaches that might be a more appropriate fit for my analysis.

Critical race theory

In this study I analyzed the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogue on race at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). After viewing the data within the context of Dialogic Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, I determined that Critical Race Theory was the most appropriate frame because race was a central construct in both this theory and in within my research question. Analyzing the data using a thematic analysis with Critical Race Theory as the conceptual framework was a more effective way to analyze the students' individual stories and counter-stories within the focus groups to identify themes relevant to sociocultural influences on race. This chapter outlines the steps involved in conducting a thematic analysis with Critical Race Theory as the conceptual framework after I describe my role as a human instrument, participant recruitment and selection, and the data collection process.

Researcher as a Human Instrument

In this type of research method, the researcher is considered a "human instrument" (Creswell, 2009). I considered my background related to race and my preparation for this type of research. I have both a personal and professional interest in advancing the research on race and college students. I am a White, college-educated woman raised in a rural town in the Western region of the United States. I approached

this study through the lens of someone who was socialized in a predominantly White, rural community with little exposure to racial diversity (Harro, 2007). I have completed numerous courses related to the research question, including multicultural counseling, diversity and equity in higher education, college student identity development, college environments, assessing diversity initiatives, Dialogic communication, and interpersonal communication. My related teaching experience includes an undergraduate course on multiculturalism.

My assumptions about race and the sociocultural influences on students conversations about race are most closely aligned with Critical Race Theory. Like the majority of Critical Race Theorists, I assume that racism is a normal, everyday part of the experiences of minorities in the United States. I assume that the relationship among race, racism, and power is complex and that giving voice to both marginalized and dominant individuals is a first step in transforming the way that we approach the reality of race in contemporary society. Finally, I assume that giving voice to students by way of hearing their stories and counter-stories about race can transform the way we approach race and confront issues of racism on the college campus. I am cognizant of the fact that my affinity for Critical Race Theory directed the way that I analyzed the data and identified themes related to the centrality of race in undergraduate students' interactions.

I am employed at the research site in an administrative capacity. My job is focused on first-year student initiatives and programs. The nature of my job involves little contact with students in the research population. At the time of data collection, I was employed at the research site for less than one year, making me a relative stranger to the research population.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The participants for the present study were drawn from the total population of undergraduate, U.S. citizen or permanent resident students enrolled at the research site. Because I was studying how undergraduate students talked about race, I included all

eligible undergraduate students in the population sample. I secured approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the research site (Approval #027) and completed a deferral agreement between the research site and my degree-granting institution. Following IRB approval, I sent an electronic invitation to the entire, eligible population (all U.S. citizen or permanent resident undergraduate students at the research site) asking them to participate in a study exploring dialogues on race (Appendix A). I limited the eligible participants to U.S. citizen or permanent resident because the shared experiences of living in the United States prior to coming to college at the research site was important for analyzing the data according to sociocultural influences. After identifying the initial study population, I e-mailed participants, asking them to identify possible, additional participants in a qualitative research strategy known as “snowballing” (Patton, 1990). As a result of “snowballing,” I included initial participants’ roommates and classmates as part of the research population. I conducted focus group interviews with a total of 16 undergraduate students (Table 1). The racial composition of the group included ten students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic, three Black/African-American, one student who identified as American Indian/Black/African-American, one White/Hispanic/Latino, and one Black/African-American/Hispanic/Latino.

Data Collection

Students were invited to participate in a semi-structured, group interview during one of five offered times. To protect the participants’ privacy, I read an oral consent form (Appendix B) and students completed a separate, contact information sheet that was used only for purposes of assigning pseudonyms and for follow-up during data analysis (Appendix C). Demographic information such as race and hometown was collected only for purposes of providing a rich description of the participants in the methods section of the report and was not stored with the interview transcripts (Patton, 1990). All identifying information, including names, locations, and hometowns, were replaced by pseudonyms to protect student confidentiality.

Table 1. Participant Key

| Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Home State |
|------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------|------------|
| Kenya | F | American Indian/Black/African- American | CA |
| Cynthia | F | Black/African-American | IL |
| Andy | M | White/Non-Hispanic | IL |
| Paul | M | Black/African-American | IA |
| Brandi | F | Black/African-American | MS |
| Bethenny | F | Black/African- American/Hispanic/Latino | IL |
| Jacqueline | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IA |
| Caroline | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IA |
| Gretchen | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IL |
| Portia | F | White/Hispanic/Latino | IA |
| Camille | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IA |
| Kim | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IL |
| Taylor | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IL |
| Michael | M | White/Non-Hispanic | IA |
| Tamara | F | White/Non-Hispanic | IA |
| Kyle | M | White/Non-Hispanic | IL |

The dialogue stimulus

Next, students watched a 40-minute documentary to stimulate the dialogue and guide the questions related to race, followed by interview questions and two online debriefing questions (Appendix D). Using a stimulus has been successful in previous research to elicit rich conversations by reporting on a desired topic (Buttney, 1998). Critical Race Theory uses stories and counter-stories to gather evidence on the nature of race. Therefore, I needed a stimulus that would elicit student's experiences in the context of race. To identify an appropriate stimulus, I reviewed several media sources (U.S. Presidential speeches on race or a "gallery" of print elicitations of various racial diversity concepts, for example), and chose a documentary titled *A Place at the Table* (Hudson, 2000), distributed by Teaching Tolerance, an anti-bias education center at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The documentary contains a series of narratives from eight high school students from multiple racial and cultural backgrounds. The producer's notes describe the purpose of the film.

Throughout our nation's history, individuals and groups, from Baptists fighting for religious freedom to families seeking gender equity in sports, have toppled barriers to become full participants in our democracy. These stories of everyday bravery are highlighted in the film. To help students identify with ongoing efforts to achieve equality, the film is narrated by teenagers who explain how their families struggled for and found 'a place at the table.' (Hudson, R., 2000).

Each student shares a narrative of his or her family's history of immigration or enslavement in the United States. For example, Carol, an Italian-American student, tells the story of how her ancestors came to the United States to escape Irish Potato Famine in the mid-19th century. Samuel describes his family's history of enslavement and how it has impacted his motivation to understand his own identity. The American Dream is a common theme throughout the eight narratives and each student includes their perception of this concept in their narrative.

The students in the film identified as Asian, Black, Native American, White/Non-Hispanic, and White/Hispanic from ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Irish, Polish, Latino, African-American, American Indian, and Japanese. The film was also an appropriate stimulus for the research study because it included students who identify as members of both minority and majority groups, making it more likely that participants from various racial backgrounds in the study would feel a connection to the narratives on race.

Focus group interviews

After viewing the documentary, I asked three questions to elicit responses about their impressions of the film:

1. What was your reaction to the film?
2. Was there a particular story that struck you? What about it struck you?

a. What, if anything, surprised you?

3. In what ways, if any, do you relate to these students' stories about race?

Following the in-person interview, I conducted two follow-up communications (Appendix D). Three days following the group interview, I sent an individual E-mail to each participant asking questions about how it felt to participate in a dialogue on race. One week following the group interview, I invited participants from all group interviews to participate in an online, asynchronous conversation. The three types of communication events (the focus groups and electronic follow-ups) were analyzed as a whole. After conducting five separate focus groups, I determined that I was hearing similar responses from the participants and had reached "saturation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data Analysis

Following each interview, I began the process of analyzing the data, which I outline here. I listened to the audio files in their entirety, taking notes as I listened to particular phrases, words, or stories that seemed salient to the research question. Next, I wrote reflective memos on each interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), summarizing the overall impression of the conversation, making note of possible, relevant themes present in the conversations, and addressing the analytical questions. Conducting this initial step in data analysis in tandem with data collection was necessary to identify recurring themes and to determine at what point I ceased to hear anything new, or, the point of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After listening and writing memos, I downloaded the digital files onto computer audio files using ExpressScribe™, a transcription software program for digital audio files. I transcribed each of the five interviews, line by line, into Microsoft Word™ documents. Following transcription, I stored each of the original digital audio files and transcriptions on a password-protected computer at my office at the research site. Transcribing the in-person interview data allowed me to become immersed in the data and to begin forming initial impressions of possible themes. Following each transcription, I wrote additional reflections on the original memos, making note of

possible themes in the margins of the printed transcripts. I also printed the e-mail responses to follow-up questions and read each in their entirety to form similar, initial impressions. After the initial analysis was complete for all texts, I conducted the next steps in the analytical process, which I describe below.

Data analysis steps

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method for becoming familiar with the data and identifying themes. I outline those steps next.

Data familiarity. In addition to transcribing the data and writing reflective briefs for each interview, as described above, I read the data sets (interviews) as a whole to get an overall sense of the narratives and themes present in each interview and in the e-mail responses.

Code generation. The second step involved reading the data line-by-line, guided by my analytical questions, to ask 'what are the participants saying?' This process is referred to as the constant comparative method in qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My answers were identified in pieces ranging from a single word or phrase, such as "harsh discrimination" to a whole sentence such as "I came from a predominantly White high school but there were some Mexicans and African-Americans too." After marking the entire data set in this manner, I cut the words, phrases, or sentences into separate pieces and affixed them to note cards.

Next, I began re-reading the cards. I began the process of comparing each card by marking the first card with a possible theme and then picking up the next card and asking myself if it was similar to or different than the preceding theme. If the card evoked a similar theme, I marked it with the same code; if not, I generated a new code and created a separate pile. For the codes, I used a combination of labels I created and "en vivo" codes—those that are the exact words used by the participants—depending on which type best illustrated the code (Creswell, 1998). For example, I grouped all multiple-race identity development words, phrases, and narratives under the code "Two halves that

make a half,” a phrase by a female respondent that captured the essence of the theme of a particular stage in multiple race identity development. At this point, some data was set aside as I determined that it was not central to the present research question.

Identifying themes. Next, I reviewed all of the codes and determined themes. In this step, some of the initial codes were combined into a single theme. This process was repeated and the codes were grouped and re-grouped until I reached saturation, or the point at which all of the codes are part of larger themes.

First Sort: Themes

1. “American Dream”
2. Becoming White
3. Immigration
4. Assimilation
5. Bystander
6. Reparations
7. Perception of Native Americans
8. Traditions and identity formation
9. “The code”
10. Minimization of oppression
11. Discrimination
12. Segregation
13. Stereotypes
14. Family influence
15. Cultural amnesia
16. White approach to race
17. The “N” Word
18. Color blind
19. Perceptions of US racial history
20. Attitude toward dialogue
21. Racial tension
22. Community
23. Cultural envy/”they have culture”
24. Multiple race identity/”two halves that make a half”
25. Identity shame
26. “Acting Black”
27. What is the norm?
28. White History
29. Black History
30. Benevolent racism

Second Sort: Themes

1. American Dream
 - a. Assimilation
 - b. Immigration
 - c. Becoming White
2. Perceptions of US racial history
 - a. White history
 - b. Black history
 - c. Perception of Native Americans
 - d. Family influence
 - e. Reparations
3. Multiple Race Identity: “Two halves that make a half”
 - a. Identity shame
 - b. “acting Black”
4. Black racial identity
 - a. “the code”
 - b. stereotypes
 - c. community
5. White racial identity
 - a. Cultural amnesia
 - b. Cultural envy/”they have culture”
 - c. What is the norm
 - d. Traditions and identity formation
6. Oppression
 - a. Segregation
 - b. Isolation
 - c. Discrimination
 - d. Minimizing oppression
7. White approach to race
 - a. Color blind
 - b. The “N” word
 - c. Benevolent racism
 - d. Bystander

Third Sort: Themes

1. The American Dream
 - a. Assimilation
 - b. Immigration
 - c. Becoming White
 - d. Perceptions of US racial history
 - e. White history
 - f. Black history
 - g. Perception of Native Americans
 - h. Family influence
 - i. Reparations
2. Black/Multiple Race Identity/”Two halves that make a half”

- a. Identity shame
- b. “acting Black”
- c. Black racial identity
- d. “the code”
- e. stereotypes
- f. community
- 3. White racial identity
 - a. Cultural amnesia
 - b. Cultural envy/”they have culture”
 - c. What is the norm
 - d. Traditions and identity formation
- 4. Oppression
 - a. Segregation
 - b. Isolation
 - c. Discrimination
 - d. Minimizing oppression
 - e. The “N” word
 - f. Benevolent racism
 - g. Bystander
 - h. Color blind
 - i. White approach to race
- 5. *Fourth Sort: Themes*
 - a. The American Dream
 - b. Racial Identity Development
 - c. Experiences of Oppression

Reading and reviewing the themes. At this stage, I reviewed the themes and returned to the original data set to check if there were words, phrases or sentences that had been overlooked and that may have fit into any of my identified themes.

Defining the themes. In the final sort of the data, when I had determined that no new relevant themes could be found, I assigned a name to each theme, and then grouped them into three overarching themes: *Interpretations of the American Dream*, *Racial identity development: The invisibility of race versus becoming racial beings*, and *The nature of oppression: Dominant versus subordinate experiences of oppression*.

Locating exemplars. In this final step, I returned to the original data set and located pieces of the data that exemplified each theme. These were used to represent each of the themes identified in the preceding steps and were the focus of the analysis (See Appendix E). Exemplars are those pieces of text that I believed evoked the essence of the

themes found throughout the interviews for a particular overarching theme (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Even though I decided not to use Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogism nor did I execute a contrapuntal analysis, a few of the steps recommended by Baxter in dialogic analyses were useful in my thematic analysis of the data. First, I formed a few guiding questions to keep in mind as I became familiar with the data: 1. What is race? 2. What is oppression? 3. What is power? 4. What is privilege? Having these questions in mind helped to focus my review and to frame the data in a way that would inform my research question within the framework of Critical Race Theory. As a visual reminder during the analysis, I posted these questions in my office on an 8x10 sheet of paper to reference as I reviewed the data. Next, I followed Baxter's (2011) suggestion of using strategies from Martin and White's (2005) concept of engagement in Appraisal Theory to identify specific words or phrases where individuals are signaling contradiction. Although I was not using contrapuntal analysis, I found that the speech markers useful in identifying the ways in which both minority and majority students attempted to construct the reality of race from their perspective.

Martin and White identify various speech markers that are useful in identifying competition including *negating*, *countering*, and *entertaining*. *Negating* is marked by direct or indirect reported speech. *Countering* is marked by words such as *although*, *however*, *but*, *yet*, *nonetheless* (Martin & White, p. 120). *Entertaining* signals that a given theme is but one possibility in a range of alternative themes. Words that signify this strategy include *may*, *might*, *must*, *could*, *it's possible that*, *it's likely*, *it seems* and so on. Within these themes, students called primarily on *countering*, and particularly with the use of the word "but." For one example of countering, consider this: "I know race used to be an issue, but I think we're past that now." This exemplar contains the word "but" to signal how the participant positions the themes of racial harmony and discord. Here, the

participant calls on a theme of racial tension as an historical event and then uses the marker “but” to counter this theme with that of racial harmony.

Verifying the data

Member checking. After arriving at the final themes, I contacted a subgroup of participants and invited them to read select exemplars and provide feedback. Asking participants to provide feedback on the analysis is a means by which the researcher can verify the findings. Six students who were still at the research site the following semester were contacted via e-mail for this purpose. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this step as “member checking.” I prepared a set of six exemplars that represented each of the three overarching themes and sent this, along with the purpose of the study and a brief paragraph discussing the themes, to the six students from the study. At this point, four of the students shared their impressions of the themes through e-mail responses, describing the extent to which they believed their dialogues were accurately represented within the themes. Two of the students identified as White/Non-Hispanic, one identified as Black/African-American and one identified as Black/African-American/Hispanic. Each of the four students agreed that the themes I identified in the themes were an accurate representation of the way they made meaning of race during our conversation.

Peer debriefing. After completing my analysis, I shared samples of my data with two separate colleagues in the field for the purposes of peer debriefing, a process suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to aid in the validity of the data and to verify claims made about the themes identified in the data and the larger cultural context (Baxter, 2011). I obtained IRB approval to share samples of the data in a peer debrief process I describe next. I engaged in this process with two colleagues—one with expertise conducting analyses in the field of interpersonal communication and another with expertise in college student development and qualitative research. First, I contacted a colleague in Interpersonal Communication. This peer is a doctoral candidate in Interpersonal Communication at my degree-granting institution. He identifies as

White/Non-Hispanic. He has taken numerous courses on communication theory. He has published articles and papers using qualitative research methods. I shared three interview transcripts with this individual, along with my analytical questions and research question, asking him to conduct a thematic analysis. Following his review, we held an in-person meeting where he shared a written and verbal summary of the themes he identified among the data. We discussed the themes that we had in common and arrived at similar overall impressions of the data as it related to my research question. Finally, we discussed what we thought the central theme was across the data and considered ways that I could represent this central theme in my findings. I outline this process in the next chapter.

Next, I shared three interviews with a colleague in Higher Education and Student Affairs, asking her to identify themes within the interviews. My colleague in Higher Education earned her Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from my degree-granting institution and took numerous courses in college student environments, psychosocial identity development, multicultural counseling, qualitative research methods, and diversity and equity in education. She also participated in a research study on Privileged Identity Development (Watt, 2007), and conducted original qualitative research for her dissertation. She identifies as White/Non-Hispanic. I shared my analytical and research questions with her. The purpose of the second audit was to gain the perspective of a colleague with in-depth knowledge of college student development and campus racial diversity climates to compare findings on overall themes.

I asked her to identify themes throughout the three interviews and to write a summary memo on each. We met in-person to discuss her findings, after which I compared her themes to those I had identified in my analysis. Both peer audits aided in the integrity of my findings and served an important role in exploring possible themes within the focus group conversations. The process of peer debriefing was the second means by which I verified the themes I identified in the data analysis and helped to confirm their relevance to the research question.

Ethical considerations

I took measures such as changing identifying information such as specific city, school, and participant names from the raw data before presenting them in the analysis and summary presented in this study. Patton (1990) suggests taking security measures with data collected during research. I stored the original audio files of each interview on a password-protected computer and kept all hard copies of interview transcripts, data analysis, memos, and related notes in a locked file cabinet. I shared a verbal consent document with all participants prior to beginning each interview to inform them of possible risks and benefits to talking about race in the research setting. When presenting biographical sketches of the participants in Chapter Four, I was careful to not describe specific club or organization names, hometowns, or school names in order to protect their identity.

Limitations

This study included a few limitations, including population sample, interaction between the interviewer and participants, and interviewer subjectivity. The participants volunteered to participate in a dialogue about race. It is possible that those students who responded are those that are more willing to talk about issues of race. Therefore, the experiences and perspectives of the sample may not be transferrable to all members of the population at the research site or to student experiences at similar institutions.

Another limitation was the possible response bias as a result of the nature of collecting qualitative data via in-person interviews. Yin (2009) suggests that interview data can be biased due to participants saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear, offering socially desirable answers on potentially controversial topics, or participants not remembering accurate details of their lives relevant to the research questions. In this study, students may have also responded differently to my questions based on their racial identity or the nature of the topic.

Finally, although I outlined my background and approach to the research topic earlier in this chapter, I am aware that my personal background and education informed my data analysis and findings. I acknowledged my researcher subjectivity throughout the process but understand that the data is subject to interpretation based on my orientation to the material and my own experiences with the topic of race.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the purpose of the study designed to explore how undergraduate students talk about race at a Predominantly White Institution. I provided a rationale for the research methods, outlined the steps I took in collecting, analyzing, and verifying the data, taking into account possible limitations in the study. The next chapter describes the research findings as a result of these study methods.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' dialogues about race at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This chapter presents the findings from a study of five semi-structured focus group interviews with sixteen students from diverse backgrounds at the investigation site. The participants' names and backgrounds (city names and high school names) have been changed to protect their privacy while still allowing their stories and perspectives to inform the research question.

The participants in this study had varying degrees of experience with individuals whom they described as racially different from themselves prior to coming to college at the research site. Nine out of the ten White students recalled knowing one or more students that they would identify as "Black," "African-American," "Hispanic," or "Mexican" that they remembered from elementary or high school but only two of those same students described having interactions with those peers or called them "friends." All six of the students who identified as Black/African-American or Black/African American/American Indian or Black/African-American/Hispanic described their first interactions with White students at their elementary and high schools. Three students identified as having one or more minority racial identities. All of the multiple-identity students described their interactions with other students of color at various points in their education and talked about these interactions in terms of how it impacted their view of their own racial identity.

Overall, the students' interactions varied in both breadth and depth, but just two of the White students described close friendships with peers of a different race. Four of the participants attended what they described as racially diverse elementary and secondary schools but interacted primarily with same-race peers, and three of the racial

minority participants recalled forming friendships with at least one or two peers from a different racial background prior to coming to college at the research site. When asked what they meant by “racially diverse” high school or neighborhood, the participants responded that they viewed their school as diverse because it included more than a few people who were different from themselves, or that the community included a specific minority population.

The participants also recalled learning about race by hearing their immediate and extended family members talk about race or observing family members’ interactions with members of a different race. Thirteen of the participants in the study recounted specific conversations with a family member about race or racial interactions. These conversations were characterized by topics such as interracial dating or marriage or having friends of different races at school. Eight participants recalled specific instances of what could be described as experiences with racial discrimination. These participants’ stories were recollections of being the target of discrimination or being the person who discriminated against someone of a different race. Specifically, participants who identified as a racial minority shared personal instances where they encountered what they would describe as unequal treatment based on their race, and those who identified as White/Non-Hispanic described instances where they had witnessed unequal treatment of an individual based on his or her race or used negative stereotypes or racial slurs as young children toward members of the minority race.

Before sharing the findings as they relate to the themes I identified as relevant to the research question, I present brief biographical sketches of the participants and their backgrounds related to race and racial interactions. These sketches are relevant to the research question and framework of Critical Race Theory because the students’ individual backgrounds and the values, practices, beliefs and interactions with others shape how they make meaning of race.

*Participant Biographical Sketches**Kenya*

Kenya is a female, American Indian/Black/African-American from California. She recalled attending several elementary schools in urban areas of California due to being homeless on a few different occasions and moving frequently. She attended racially diverse elementary and high schools. She described her neighborhoods as diverse but noted that she didn't have a lot of friends due to moving around a lot. She came to college at the research site to compete in intercollegiate athletics and liked the small size. She has been involved in athletics, residence life, and the campus multicultural organization. Kenya reported knowing all of the members of the focus group through membership in the student multicultural organization. She did not recall having conversations about the interview after participating in the conversation.

Cynthia

Cynthia is a Black/African-American female from Illinois. She attended a predominantly White elementary school but a diverse high school. She associated with "everyone" in both elementary and high school and was raised in a diverse neighborhood where she says she grew up seeing "lots of colors" and recalled calling White girls "peachy girls" and Black/African-American girls "brown girls." She chose the research site for college because of it offered her major and she felt welcomed by the people there. Cynthia was involved in the multicultural club, worked as a resident advisor, and performed in Improv and Theatre. She was friends or roommates with all of the members of her focus group. She was roommates with "Kenya." She did not recall talking about the interview experience or the film with anyone after the study.

Andy

Andy is a Male, White/Non-Hispanic from Illinois. He attended elementary and high school in an urban area of Illinois. He described his high school as "predominantly White with a decent-sized Hispanic population" and reported associating with peers from

different races throughout high school. He grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood with Hispanic being the next largest population. He attended college at the research site because the financial aid package was desirable. He was involved in the multicultural student organization and Jazz and Pep bands. Andy was friends with two of the members of the focus group and “Paul” was his resident assistant on campus. Andy did not follow up with any of his peers about the interview following his participation.

Paul

Paul is a Black/African-American male from Iowa. He attended a predominantly White elementary school but considered his high school to be diverse. He associated with a “diverse group of friends” in both elementary and high school and described his neighborhood as diverse even though it was considered a Black neighborhood. He chose to attend college at the research site because of the location and cost and was involved in the multicultural student organization, worked for the Admissions Office as a tour guide, was a Resident Advisor, played in an orchestra, and was involved in both church and community volunteer activities. He was friends with the other members of his interview group, either from being in programs or clubs together or living together in the residence halls. Paul reported that he talked about the film with his peers after participating in the interview.

Brandi

Brandi is a female, Black/African-American from Mississippi. She attended elementary schools in Mississippi and Iowa and attended high school in a mid-sized city in Iowa. Her elementary school in Iowa was predominantly White but the high school she attended was racially diverse. She chose to attend college at the research site to participate in intercollegiate athletics and also for the financial aid package and location. She has been involved in residence life, athletics, and the student multicultural organization. She knew Bethenny, the other member of her focus group, from having a class together but did not talk about the experience following the study.

Bethenny

Bethenny identified as a Black/African-American/Hispanic/Latino female and is from Illinois in a suburb outside of Chicago. She attended what she described as “extremely diverse” elementary and high schools. She had friends from different cultures throughout school and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. She chose to attend college at the research site because it offered her major and she was involved in the multicultural student organization, a club connected to her major, and “anything involving music.” She knew “Brandi” from taking a class together, but did not talk about the movie or interview experience with anyone following the study.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline is a female, White/Non-Hispanic from a mid-sized city in Iowa. She attended predominantly White elementary and high schools and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. She associated mainly with students who were the same race throughout elementary and high school. She chose to attend college at the research site primarily for location and size. She did not report knowing any of the other participants in her focus group. Following the interview, she did report talking to her parents about their family history because the idea of knowing one’s heritage “really stuck” with her.

Caroline

Caroline is a White/Non-Hispanic, female from rural Iowa. She attended predominantly White schools throughout her elementary and secondary education in a small town of 1,500 people. Caroline characterized her town as “primarily White.” She was one of 44 students in her graduating class. Caroline reported associating with people of her own race and couldn’t recall being “actual friends” with anyone who was not White. Caroline chose to attend college at the research site because of its “feeling of community.” She has been involved in University Chorale, Green Life (the sustainability club), lived in an academic-themed residence hall, and served as a student leader for STARS (Students Trained as Role Models) and as a Peer Assistant for first-year students

in a college transitions seminar. She reported knowing one person in the focus group—“Portia”—because they took Women’s Studies courses together. She does not recall seeing the other participants before the interview and has not seen them since. After the interview, Caroline visited with her mother about her family history. She reported having a desire to know about her “great and great-great” relatives and said she realized after the interview experience that she didn’t know much at all about her family’s past.

Gretchen

Gretchen is a female, White/Non-Hispanic from a large city in Illinois. She attended private elementary and high schools, both of which were predominantly White. She also reported living in a predominantly White neighborhood. She recalled interacting with “everyone” in elementary school but mostly White students in high school. She chose to attend college at the research site because of the religious affiliation, size, and friendly atmosphere. She has been involved primarily in campus ministry and her major. She did not report knowing anyone in the focus group, but did report talking to her mother the next time she was home about her family history as a result of attending the focus group.

Portia

Portia is a female, White/Non-Hispanic/Latino from a mid-sized city in Iowa. She attended elementary and high school in the same town, which she described as being racially diverse. She had friends of various racial backgrounds in both elementary and high school and said that she was “everybody’s friend.” She lived in a racially diverse neighborhood but recalls being the only “mixed” kid on the block. She chose to attend the research institution for college because of location and has been involved in the multicultural student organization as well as programs and events related to Women’s Studies. She knew “Caroline” from her focus group because they had a class together prior to the study. She did not discuss the study with any of her peers after the interviews.

Camille

Camille is a White/Non-Hispanic female from Iowa. She attended predominantly White elementary and high schools and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. She described her school diversity as, "I could probably count on one hand the number of non-whites in the entire town on one hand." Camille reported that her best friend in early elementary school was Black and then for the rest of her education she had mostly White friends. Camille chose to attend college at the research site because, "The campus was beautiful and the people were friendly." She also thought it was a good distance from home and her sister was an alum. Camille is involved in Residence Life, Student Alumni Association, and the Sexual Assault Awareness Team (SAAT). She also dabbled in Campus Activities Board (CAB), Mock Trial, and a Bible study group. Camille was involved in her church and also volunteered as a tutor for the local Boys and Girls Club. She did not know the other members of her interview group but does recall seeing some of them at Women's Studies events and SAAT meetings. She reported talking to her Hall Director after participating in the interview. She knew that her Hall Director was someone interested in issues of race and White privilege, so she found her to be a natural person with whom to "tease out my thoughts."

Kim

Kim is a White/Non-Hispanic female from Illinois in suburb of Chicago. She went to elementary and high school this suburb and recalled having one Black/African-American student in her classes before coming to college. She characterized her interactions with racial diversity as, "My peers were White, my town was very white, my neighborhood was White, not much racial diversity present." Kim chose to attend college at the research site for the "tight-knit" community, the campus and the Catholic heritage. She has been involved in Campus Ministry, a social activism group, and College Collegiate. She did not know the other members of her group. Kim reported talking to her family about the study after participating in the interview.

Taylor

Taylor is a female, White/Non-Hispanic from the Chicago-area suburbs of Illinois. Her neighborhood was predominantly White. She attended private elementary and high schools, both of which were predominantly White with Hispanic being the next highest population. She recalled that there were just two Black/African-American students at her high school. She was friends with everyone in elementary school but “hung out with mostly peers of the same race” in high school. She chose to attend college at the research site because it was a small private school and offered her major. She has been involved in Residence Life, a campus social justice organization, and campus ministry. She attended the focus group with her roommate “Tamara” and also knew “Kyle” from a campus ministry retreat they attended together. Taylor reported having a few follow-up discussions with “Tamara” after the interview.

Michael

Michael is a male, White/Non-Hispanic from a mid-sized city in Iowa. He attended predominantly White, public elementary and high schools. He lived in a predominantly White neighborhood but reported having friends from different backgrounds while in high school. He chose to attend college at the research site because they offered him the best financial aid and he liked the size and location. He has been involved in campus ministry and also local service organizations that serve recent immigrants to the area. He did not know the other members of the focus group and did not talk about the study following the interview.

Tamara

Tamara is a female, White/Non-Hispanic from a mid-sized city in eastern Iowa. She was educated throughout elementary and middle school through a combination of private school and homeschooling. She reported knowing “only one African-American student and a couple Latinos” in elementary and middle school but said that her high school was “extremely diverse.” She described her peer associations as mainly same-race

and her neighborhood as predominantly White. Tamara chose to attend college at the research site because of the athletic programs and religious affiliation. She was involved in a social justice club, participated in intercollegiate athletics, studied abroad in Mexico and was a resident assistant. She participated in the focus group with her roommate, “Taylor” and did not know the other members of the group. After participating in the focus group, Tamara asked her mom to share information about her ancestry and was referred to her aunt because her mom told her it hadn’t ever concerned her so she didn’t know much about the family history. She planned to contact her aunt about her questions.

Kyle

Kyle is a male, White/Non-Hispanic from a large city in Illinois. He attended both elementary and high school in the same city and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. He recalled having some Black/African-American friends in both elementary and high school but had mostly same-race peers. He chose to attend college at the research site because they offered the major he was interested in and he also wanted to attend a small college. He did not know any of the other members of the focus group but recalled seeing them on campus following the study. He did not talk about the study or issues related to it after the interview.

Findings

In the previous chapter, I described the methods I used to identify themes present in the data that were relevant to the research question and framed by Critical Race Theory. The themes are presented as: *Interpretations of The American Dream*, *Racial identity development: The invisibility of race versus becoming racial beings*, and *The nature of oppression: Dominant versus subordinate experiences of oppression*. These themes represent relevant places to address the research question: What are the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students’ conversations on race at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)? In this chapter I will discuss the findings within each of the three themes by describing them in rich detail.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

| Theme | Sub-Themes |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Interpretations of “The American Dream” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Immigration and becoming White b. Positioning the self in American History |
| 2. Racial Identity Development: Making Race Invisible Versus Becoming Racial Beings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. White Identity b. Black/Multiple Race Identity c. Understanding Identity |
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Overview of the Themes

Interpretations of the American dream

The idea of the American Dream is a widely accepted set of ideals for achievement and opportunity in the United States (Adams, 1931). The idea of the American Dream was invoked in the participants’ talk, which I categorized into two sub-themes: *Immigration and becoming “White”* and *Positioning the self in American history*. All sixteen of the participants in the study recognized this term and framed their reactions to the stories in the film within this ideology. Students understood the meaning of The American Dream to be that of having the opportunity to succeed and prosper regardless of background. Much like the students in the documentary who shared their impressions of the American Dream through their family narratives, the students in the study told stories of how their own ancestors came to the United States if their parents or extended relatives had shared stories with them. White students either shared their particular family history of coming to the United States or, more often, speculated on what the experience

of both White immigrants and immigrants of color might have been. Students who identified as a member of a racial minority spoke in terms of “I” or “We” when talking about the American Dream and their family’s experience coming to the United States. White students used “We” when talking about both their personal family history and the history of White immigrants in general, and also talked about “Them” or “They” when talking about immigrants from racial backgrounds different from themselves.

*Racial identity development: Making race invisible
versus becoming racial beings*

Findings related to students’ discussion of their racial identity is presented within the following three sub-themes: *White identity*, *Black/Multiple race identity*, and *Understanding identity*. The students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic framed their reactions to the film in terms of their identity as a White individual and as an American who identifies as White/Non-Hispanic. Students described how they felt as a White person watching a film about historical oppression. Students also described personal incidences where they either treated someone differently based on race, displayed negative stereotypes, or observed someone being treated differently based on race. Within the narratives of racial identity, students described what it meant to be a White person, a person who identifies as a racial minority, or a person who identifies with multiple racial minority groups.

The minority students in the study talked about their racial identity in terms of how they developed an awareness of their race in school settings. Some students recalled the first time they were aware that their physical features were distinct from their White peers, for example, or moving to a predominantly White neighborhood or elementary school where they were aware that they were different. Students who identified as a minority race also recalled their first conversations with White peers where they were labeled as “Black,” called pejorative terms related to their race, or had confrontations with peers from all races about their mixed race identity. Some of the minority students

also discussed how they worked to take the focus away from their race in order to succeed once they arrived at college at the research site.

The nature of oppression: Dominant and subordinate group experiences with oppression

Participants from all racial backgrounds represented in the study shared instances from their childhood and young adulthood consistent with the theme of oppression. Findings related to this theme are presented within three sub-themes: *Subordinate group experiences with oppression*, *Dominant group experiences with oppression*, and *understanding oppression*. White students reflected on treating minority groups as inferior or observing instances of discrimination. Minority students shared instances where they were subject to heightened scrutiny, the target of negative stereotypes, and unjust treatment. Participants talked about personal experiences related to racial oppression, sharing stories about both peer and family interactions about race.

Students who identified as White reflected on their childhood and family interactions, recalling specific instances where they treated someone of a different race negatively and how their parents or older siblings reacted to the incident. Other White students recalled having conversations about race with grandparents, aunts, and uncles, where they learned that interracial dating, for example, was not accepted in their family. Students who identified as a minority race also described specific incidents of discrimination from their early childhood, including seeing racial slurs written on playground slides, observing a parent get turned down for housing, and learning about a sibling being called the “n-word” at school.

Next, I will describe the findings in greater detail. I will use the students’ voices to illuminate each of the themes and sub-themes to provide a rich picture of the ways they made meaning of race in their conversations.

Theme 1: Interpretations of the American Dream

1a. Immigration and becoming White

Students talked about immigration to the United States in terms of becoming American, losing identity, and becoming White. This talk was mostly originated from the White students in the study, who had common ideas of what it meant to immigrate to the United States and speculated on various immigrant group experiences upon arrival to the United States. Caroline, a White/Non-Hispanic student from rural Iowa, begins her reaction to the idea of the American Dream by discussing the contrast between immigrant expectations of opportunity and their reality upon arrival.

I thought they had all these false perceptions of what the American Dream was; I think they thought they were supposed to come over and everything was supposed to work out but then they realized that they were still going to have to work hard. And I think one of the biggest problems is that nothing was actually established here. So, maybe if they would have stayed in their home country they may have prospered more, because there was established civilization there.

In this same response, Caroline also describes the United States as an uncivilized place, saying “nothing was actually established here.”

Jacqueline, a White/Non-Hispanic student from Iowa, talked about immigrant cultures and the process of becoming American. Jacqueline described The American Dream as an ideal of diverse people coming together and then becoming a homogenous group of citizens. She also discusses privilege, suggesting that if you are White, you can forsake culture, but if you are not White, then you must cling to a cultural identity.

Well, there were like so many immigrant cultures, and they're very different and they all have their own thing, and then they come to America and they're like, all the same. I mean there were still Germans, and French, and then they all learned that White is what you want to be because the darker people, you know, they're bad. And it's good to be White. So it stops being important, what your culture is; it's more important that you're White, because you're privileged. And then, if you're dark, you're not White, so they have to connect to something; they can't be White, so they have to emphasize that sort of thing [their culture].

Gretchen, another White/Non-Hispanic student from Illinois responded to Jacqueline and used language that supported Jacqueline's language that suggested becoming American meant becoming White.

Yeah, if there's White, I think there's a bunch of different ethnicities, but if you were to ask someone they might say, Black, White, and Mexican. They might not say, 'well, there's German, and um, Czechoslovakian, and Welsh...' There's White and that's what you are.

She talks about diversity—"there's a bunch of different ethnicities"—and also of White as the privileged race: "There's White and that's what you are." The competition is marked by countering with the use of the word "but." Jacqueline's response reinforces the discourse of White as privileged when she says, "It's prized; it's considered the best."

Each of the ten students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic used language that described a discourse of racial diversity in competition with a discourse of becoming a homogenous population in America. Whites immigrated, assimilated into American society and culture, and became the desired race. Immigrants who identified as a minority race, however, had to struggle to maintain their sense of identity since they could not become White. Caroline's language reinforces the idea of losing one's identity as part of the process of becoming an American. She reacts to Jacqueline and Gretchen's exchange about becoming American and agrees with their ideas of becoming American as becoming White.

I would agree with that. I think people just lost a lot of their self-identity when they came to America simply because they were White and that's really, that was the most important thing.

Gretchen also describes the process of becoming American.

I thought that they all wanted the same thing—to come over for the American Dream and none of them seemed to get it.

When asked to clarify her statement about pursuing the American Dream, Gretchen's talked about false representation of the American Dream.

I think that Americans actually created the problem too because they made it look like a place where people could come and prosper. They wanted the immigrants to come over to help build things like the railroad and they

didn't have enough people to do it and they wanted, they were working against like Communism and stuff so they wanted people to think America was better.

Another White student offered his interpretation of the American Dream and the discourse of becoming American. Michael, a White/Non-Hispanic student from rural Iowa described immigration as a refuge from oppression but also as disillusionment and limited opportunity. The use of the word "but" is again a marker that signifies countering in his ideas about immigration and The American Dream. On one hand, he sees the opportunities for immigrants as better than in their home country, while acknowledging on the other hand that they and their children are still going to face limited opportunities.

I'm familiar with working with people looking for the American dream from their perspective, so...and how some of these people feel kind of like you know, it's difficult with their situation because they are not the same boat as like previous generations, like where coming here was not a choice, but um, so I think their attitudes are a little different, but their quality of life is much better here than in their part of the world. But I think especially the adults in this group are kind of ignorant to what the real opportunities are going to be for their children because like, um, their generation is going to struggle and they are not going to learn that much English. But their children are probably not going to benefit that much either because of education.

Michael also describes the American Dream as the potential to offer opportunity for future generations when he says, "It will probably be another generation before they see any benefits."

Michael also makes meaning of the ideology of the American Dream in his talk. He uses the example of Irish immigrants experiencing initial hardship and then assimilating into the desirable, White culture because of their physical attributes.

Maybe another thing that contributes to the feeling is that a lot of White people do have pretty recent ties to like Europe and immigration, but um, when like the first generation came over it was, you know, some of the experiences of intolerance and uh things like that, but because of their skin color it was easier to assimilate, so it became a thing where you know people could say, well I'm Irish and this is a bad thing, but eventually people will stop hearing my accent and it's beneficial for my family because we're a part of the power group with our skin color.

Camille responded to Michael's reaction by suggesting that to be White is to be void of struggle.

I don't know, it's just the impression I got, but if your culture is oppressed and someone's trying to get rid of you, you're going to hang on to it, and you'll want to pass that on so that it stays alive. Um, and I think maybe it's, that...that we've taken our culture for granted and I guess we maybe don't think it's, I don't know...that important or that special because no one is trying to take it away from us and so we just I guess don't see the importance of clinging on to it. But then it ends up getting lost because you don't intentionally preserve it.

Jacqueline also talked about becoming American and becoming White when she describes White people as the “first to come here.” The theme of becoming American is evidenced by her description of White people versus the “darker” immigrants who came after the Irish, for example.

White people were the first people to come here and then after a few generations they just saw themselves as the “true Americans.” It's like, ‘we're actually Americans’ and any immigrant coming after that, that came from Ireland for example were different cause they weren't there for generations, they weren't real Americans, so to speak, so they were discriminated against. They don't have the same opportunities, they can't get as high because they weren't real Americans. Until eventually, darker people come in from like Russia, and people from WWII, like the Jews and people with different cultures and much darker skin, so the Irish, who were discriminated against before, they get to be White now, because they're not as bad as like the Japanese people coming. They're not as different. So they stop concentrating on the Irish people, because they're not as dark.

1b. Positioning the self in American history

The students who identified as belonging to a minority race described their family through physical characteristics and individual stories. Kenya, a Black/African-American/American Indian student reacted to a story of a Native American student in the film because it reminded her of her own family members. In Kenya's description of her great grandfather, she uses language that describes Native American as undesirable but her great grandfather had uncharacteristic physical features that made him desirable to the plantation owners. She counters the idea of Native American as unattractive with the word “but,” as she describes his nice skin and nice hair. She also uses countering to describe how her culture has in a sense died but that she acknowledges it nonetheless through stories such as this.

I think I probably liked Deloria (the Native American student in the film) because um, it just reminded me of my great grandfather who escaped from a plantation because of how he looked. He was Native American, but he had these gray eyes, and he had this like really nice skin, really nice hair, so they wanted to keep him. But he was able to escape. And it was really amazing to see how like the culture has kind of like died through the generations of my family but they do let you know that no matter what you are Native American, you have history there. You don't do dances and stuff like that but it's there and you should be proud of it. Which I am.

Bethenny, a Black/African-American/Hispanic student also describes her family history and the way she learned about her race. Bethenny learned about history through predominantly White education but also learned through minority-authored books.

I learned my heritage about my mother's side fairly quickly. She's Spanish and Italian and um, so I learned, I grew up that way. I grew up Hispanic. My dad wasn't around to teach the Black portion I guess, um, so it was pretty much up to my mom to take me to the library and learn my Black heritage that way. She loaded me up with books (laughter). As soon as I could read. Where we lived was predominantly White and so the way they taught diversity was like the big figures, so like MLK, and oh yeah there was Civil Rights and it was great and it was so tough for them. So my mom realized that and was like, 'You're going to go to a Black library in Chicago and you're gonna get a bunch of books.' And that's how I ended up knowing, technically, the history.

When the students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic responded to questions about how the stories in the film made them think about race, most reflected on their own racial and cultural heritage, often using cultural terms interchangeably with race. For example, when a student was asked what the film prompted her to think about her own race, she answered by listing the native countries from which her ancestors immigrated, but did not use racial terms such as "White" as a characterization. Common among their responses were descriptions of their racial identity as part of the "melting pot" idea of immigration and assimilation into American society. Most admitted that they were not entirely familiar with their heritage, while some talked about various countries from which their ancestors immigrated. When describing their heritage, most students considered their backgrounds to be a positive representation of the American Dream.

Taylor, a White/Non-Hispanic female from rural Illinois, used language that suggested her skin color allowed her to be privileged, saying that her skin color shielded her from “a lot of things”.

Um, it made me feel um, lucky I guess. I’m a classic example of American melting pot. My great grandpa came from overseas, I have Native American, I look Italian but I’m not, I mean, classic everything. My parents don’t even tell me what I am because it’s just such a variety. So the fact is that I have bits and pieces of everything that came into what I am, but probably because of my skin color for some reason is why I’ve been so well off. So unexposed to a lot of things.

Another White/Non-Hispanic student, Kim, says that she doesn’t know exactly what her heritage includes, but she describes this as “kinda cool,” a positive representation of the American melting pot as a great melding of cultures and races into something distinctly American.

I feel like for me, I don’t know a whole lot just because there’s so much. Like, I know some of it comes from Czechoslovakia, and some of it comes from Native Americans and from other different areas, so there’s not even enough of one thing in me to pinpoint a specific region where I came from, which is kind of cool because I’m a classic example of American melting pot. I could be anything under the sun but at the same time I’m not enough of one thing to claim it.

Some students’ language suggested a sort of ambivalence about their history.

Jacqueline reported not knowing about her family history.

I don’t know anything about my family history. Um, I know that they came from (Country in Eastern Europe). I don’t know why or who or what different nationalities came from where or why or who I am. So I don’t really know what to relate to. Except that I’m White, obviously.

Caroline also describes her family history as various nationalities but admits not knowing individual stories or lives in their immigration story. She then responds to the idea that to know one’s history is important. She paraphrases one of the people in the film saying that to know one’s history is to know the self.

That’s kind of the same boat I’m in. I guess I don’t know a lot about my family history. I know I’m part Irish, Belgian, French, German, but that’s almost the extent of it. I know how my grandparents lived, but that’s just in America. I don’t know who came here originally, or anything, or their lives before coming here. And I think, that’s one of the things in the film, in the very beginning, one of the guys was saying that people should know

their history and where they come from because that's part of them. And I guess that makes a lot of sense, and I don't necessarily think I've ever taken the initiative to ask or study, or ask questions about my history.

Andy, a White/Non-Hispanic student, also expressed the desire to know his history. Andy has a desire to know his identity through stories of ancestors who immigrated to the United States.

I actually am not entirely sure what my heritage is, but I know that one of my great great grandparents went to Ellis Island as well. I don't exactly know what he faced when he got here, but I should figure that out sometime.

Jacqueline also describes her efforts to discover more about her racial identity and says that she knows little more than the origin of her last name. Here, Jacqueline describes the effort she has made to discover more about her identity by asking her mom to tell her about her ancestors.

I've like asked my mom about it, thinking she would know about it more, but all my grandparents are deceased, so I can't ask them how their parents got here, or what it was like, and I think my mom did do a background search to find out where the family tree starts and stuff, but that's really about it. Some people came from France. And my last name is (Name), so I'm Norwegian, but that's really about it. And I think that they were French and they came to Canada and then here. And that's all I know.

Theresa references "they" when talking about the students who identified as members of racial minorities in the film. She also reports not knowing her history and expressed jealousy of those who are aware of their family history.

I know I'm (Western European) and that's all my mother has ever told me. I don't know when we came to America, it just seemed so far away. So yeah, I don't know anything about my heritage and it kinda made me jealous that they had a background and I don't.

Gretchen describes her family's immigrant history but also expresses the desire to understand more about her grandmother's immigration to the United States, specifically wanting to know more about her "struggles" that came as a result of not knowing how to speak English.

Yeah, my grandparents came from Czechoslovakia, and that's pretty much all I know. I know she was very young. But like you said, all my grandparents are deceased, so I can't ask them how they were treated

when they came to America. But I wonder what her struggles were when she came, because I know she didn't speak English.

Camille also reacted to the students' stories in the film with a sense of envy because they seemed to know their history while she knows little more than where they come from.

She presents a discourse of locating her identity in the past, while also expressing a desire to learn more about where she came from.

It was right at the beginning when they were talking about how people don't really know their history, and these students knew the people, um, who were there ancestors. I think a lot of kids did like a family tree and things, so I know *where* my ancestors came from, but, I mean, I don't know anything about them. I don't know names, I've never seen pictures, and so that was something I kind of related to. I was like, 'Yep, that's me.'

Interviewer: Where is your family from?

All European. There's a lot of German, English, um, some Scotch-Irish, I guess, um, and then also Bohemia, so like what is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia. But I don't know which one. So...

Here, history is something that is unknown but the students are expressing the desire to understand one's background. Kim, a White/Non-Hispanic student, said that her family is simply too large to know their history.

I think for me, part of it is that my family honestly doesn't know. We maybe know the background but it's kinda twisted, or, that's not the right word, because my family's really huge, so going back that far and trying to keep everybody straight...like we have our family tree and dad's like talking to me about it and he was saying he needs to write down the more current one so I have it. But I think it's because once you get to a certain generation you don't know all the back-stories. And my great grandparents on one side, like that was complicated enough. Like, the mom left so my grandfather ended up being raised by a cousin, and had stepchildren of their own, and then so it was like, it's complicated and they honestly don't know or don't remember. And my family loves telling stories so I think they honestly don't know. I'm pretty sure they would be.

Caroline also described the desire to know her family history.

And I think a big part of it is how, at least how I experience this is, sometimes your parents keep going with the culture that they were raised with. So like both of my parents are German, mostly German, so I'm mostly German so um, there was one day where my friends and I were talking about different foods that we eat from our cultures, and I just made the comment that I don't think I necessarily eat anything special from, you know, Germany. They asked me what I eat and I was like, well I guess we eat a lot of meat and potatoes and they were like, that's what Germans eat! (laughter) and I was like, 'Well I guess I didn't know' (laughs). But

you're not necessarily being told that this is what your heritage is, you're just eating meat and potatoes for dinner.

Summary of Interpretations of the American Dream

Students described the American Dream as an ideology whereby immigrants could hope for opportunity but at the same time be disillusioned by the reality upon arrival. The idea of immigration as “becoming White” was salient in the students’ descriptions of The American Dream. Students privileged becoming White by characterizing it as “superior,” being “the best,” or “the thing to be” in their responses. Many also presented the ideas of struggle and of maintaining cultural identity as a way to survive in the face of hardship.

Some students acknowledged existing civilizations without naming them specifically. When Caroline speaks of “nothing being established here,” she describes existing civilizations prior to European immigration without actually naming those that were already in America. The idea of the American Dream as something that has to be attained by working hard and sacrificing is privileged in her talk and gives voice ultimately to the idea that the American Dream was not for everybody.

Kim acknowledges her history indirectly. She says that she “maybe knows the background but it’s kinda twisted,” and then says, “Once you get to a certain generation you don’t know all the back-stories.” Here, she suggests she may come from a diverse heritage but speaks mostly in terms of becoming American without having to know the “back-stories.” Becoming American is becoming White and therefore the need to fully understand one’s history is secondary to the idea of being an “American.”

Jacqueline and Gretchen explicitly describe what it means to be White versus being another race. Jacqueline says, “White is what you want to be because the darker people, you know, they’re bad. And it’s good to be White.” She described cultures as “having their own thing” but coming to American where they are, “like, all the same.” Caroline and Andy both voiced the desire to learn more about their family history based on what they learned in the film. When Caroline talks about her family history and

reports on one of the film's messages about knowing where you come from, she says, "Yeah, I guess that makes sense." Andy talks about his great-grandfather landing on Ellis Island and he says that he doesn't know what he went through to arrive in the United States, but then expresses that "I should find out sometime." It is in these moments in the conversations where students like Andy allow knowing one's personal history to have a voice in the process of making meaning of the American Dream related to their own experience.

*Theme 2: Racial Identity Development: Making
Race Invisible Versus Becoming Racial Beings*

2a. White identity

The students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic talked about negotiating White guilt, acknowledging past discrimination while eschewing personal responsibility, and positioning themselves as well-meaning individuals. Kim, a White/Non-Hispanic female discussed her feelings of shame as a White person and admitted to sometimes wishing she were a different skin color.

I'm ashamed to be White, honest to God. Like sometimes I wish I would wake up and be a different skin color so I wouldn't have to deal with what my race has done to people because it's not right at all and I mean, it's like I'm a White girl who grew up in the country, it was not that apparent. I didn't meet a Black or African-American person until, we had one African-American person in high school. That was it. Everybody else was White. I didn't even really know it existed until I got to college and on different service trips and stuff. And it's really weird because the way I was raised was, as long as you're working hard, you're judged more by what you're doing as a person, I mean I guess with my grandparents, well, with most people it's that way. And my family it's that way. They're not like racist really at all, um, except my extended family there is kind of an issue because well, they came from (State) and um, I guess my great grandma um, she like was one of the upper class in the south so like, they, she insists that they didn't have slaves, but just the way they talk I can see the racism there, and I love her to death and that really bothers me especially when I think that one of her daughters married an African American man which is awesome and I got to meet him it was great, but sometimes she has to sneak around the family because they don't really accept, fully accept. They live in (State), so when they came back, I got to meet him and it was awesome, but just the fact that people are ashamed to meet him and can't admit it, it really annoyed me.

Theresa talked about how she felt being White and how her perception of the way she is viewed by others affects her daily life.

Even though I'm White, I feel I am stereotyped just like other races. It may not have a profound effect on how I'm treated by other people like employees, etc., but it does affect how I live. The way I approach situations, censor my language, or treat others is different based on the way I believe they see me.

Kyle, a White/Non-Hispanic female talked about making amends for past discrimination and eschewing personal responsibility.

It almost seems like, talking and thinking about it now, it's almost like they are trying to like make up for what has been happening. Like, oh, because of that we're going to give you all this and we're not going to take any of it. And, I mean, cause we didn't live then, we're trying to do what we can now to combat that.

Theresa also talked about wanting to make amends for past discrimination while eschewing personal responsibility.

And it's hard because I don't feel like I personally did anything wrong, but you can't just wipe the slate clean. Everyone would be on the same page.

Theresa also talked about how she felt about people of different races.

I guess when I talk to people of different races, I feel like they're being judgmental of me, like I should apologize to them. So I'm not hesitant talking to them because of how I feel about them, I'm hesitant to talk to them because of how I think they feel about me. I feel like I have to apologize to them. Just like I should say over and over again that we don't feel like that anymore. That I don't feel like that to them. I'm just always thinking, 'what do they think right now? Of what I'm answering, and is that going to change how they view me?'

Some students evoked the idea of the White person as a well-meaning individual by describing instances of confronting racism in their families. When asked how she reacted to her grandmother not accepting her grandson-in-law who was Black, Kim said she made an intentional effort to show him that she was not like her family.

I guess just try to show him that I, like I went right up to him and gave him a hug. I wanted him to know that we all struggle and that we should be helping each other. Why are we putting up barriers that shouldn't be there?'

Taylor, a White/Non-Hispanic student shared a story from her childhood where she treated a peer differently based on race her subsequent efforts to be seen as a well-meaning individual.

I want to show them that not everyone feels that way anymore. I kind of had a similar situation...I don't remember this but apparently I was playing on the playground when I was little and this little Black girl wanted to come and play with me and I didn't want to. And my mom had no clue where it came from because you know I grew up in an area with nothing, no diversity at all. So she immediately went out and bought me a Black baby doll. And from then on I didn't see them, I don't see them as different. I mean, sometimes attitudes are different and you know you're not supposed to walk in the bad parts of town by yourself, but I just wish we could change all of that and make it on an even playing field I guess.

Camille talked about being a respectable White person.

I guess it just makes me think about my decisions and that while I may not be able to fix everything that happens I can still make a good impression and do what I can and like, make a White person a respectable person that people, that minorities won't think, 'you're just another White jerk that's doing this to us.'

2b. Black/multiple race identity

Students in the interviews who identified as one or more race had similar thoughts on their racial identity. When asked to describe their racial identity, they used language that suggested they had negative perceptions of themselves, and that their peers had negative reactions to their outward appearance as early as grade school. Students recalled negative stereotypes directed at them and being called racial slurs. Most students described confronting their peers when they were called racial slurs or asked about their outward appearance. In each case, the students used language that evoked the a negative perceptions of their racial identity, identity confusion, isolation, and persisting in a predominantly White environment. Portia, a student from Illinois, described her identity as “confusing.”

My identity's just confusing. Mine's always been confusing. I am the two halves that make a half. So, I went through a lot of the racial slurs and stuff. And I couldn't, I wasn't good enough on this side (gesturing with one hand to her left) and I wasn't good enough on this side (gesturing with another hand to her right). And I had to learn to get past all of the negativity. You know? And I had to learn it early. When I was really small,

really little. I was really dark as a child. I got called nigger a lot and I would scream, 'I'm not Black!' and then they were like, 'Fine, spic!' And I would scream, 'I don't even know what that is!'

Portia continued to describe her family's racial identity, using physical characteristics including skin and eye color.

So my cousins, my younger brother and older brother they are White. They look White. My older brother has blue eyes and, and then there's me. And like growing up I was really dark. So I knew what, because you know I was half, so like my dad and my mom were both dark, like the dirty dark Mexican and that was you know, my color. I went through like, a lot of like the racial, the racial slurs and stuff. I think I was like more open-minded because I've seen both sides.

Brandi, a student who identified as Black/African-American/American Indian, moved to a predominantly White city after having lived in the rural Southern region of the United States. She recalled her first interactions with her new peers in grade school.

...when I came here, I moved to (City) and there were no Black people. They thought I was a boy because I was the only Black girl. They automatically thought I was a boy.

Brandi continues to describe her experience transitioning to her new school. Like Portia, Brandi's early memories of her racial identity included being the target of negative stereotypes—that "you're all on welfare," for example. She described some of her peers as "racist" and recalled seeing "KKK" written on the slide at her playground as an example of their behavior.

Once I got to know them—and they were White and Mexicans too—it was like, 'Oh I thought you were a boy when you came here.' But at first they had stereotypes of Black people and then they got to know me and there was still racist people that, I would be on the playground and there would be like KKK written on the slide or something and people would walk up to me. One boy walked up to me and was like, 'Why are you guys taking over (City) and I know you're all on welfare.' I was in sixth grade when that happened. Fifth or sixth grade. When he said that I was in fifth grade.

When asked how she responded to the negative stereotypes accusations, used language that seemed to minimize the emotional impact by saying that she felt bad but that she doesn't "cry about stuff." She counters her experience of oppression with the marker "but," and goes on to describe her experiences at school, saying that by the time she reached middle school she was fine.

I remember feeling bad, but like I react differently than other people. I don't cry about stuff. Going from situation to situation it just builds you up and you're like 'it happens, whatever.' I know I'm not, so it doesn't matter. So, um, that happened. By the time middle school came or whatever it was fine.

Moving from middle to high school brought yet another transition in how her peers treated her.

And then I moved to (City) and went to (High School Name) and me growing up in (City), then I get to (High School Name) and I wasn't Black enough. So, I didn't talk like them. Actually a White girl came up to me and told me she was "Blacker than me." (laughter). I was like, 'Ghetto and Black are two different things.' I actually lived on (Street Name) and I didn't know that I lived on (Street Name) because I didn't act like it.

Interviewer: And how do people act that live on (Street Name)?

Um, the stereotype of (Street Name) is like ghetto, they're always fighting, low socioeconomic status, and the way they dress was not how I dressed in high school. It was probably because I picked up on sports in high school. But, yeah, so I wasn't Black enough in high school and that probably pushed me forward. I think everything up to this point pushed me forward. Cause I wasn't White enough in (City), and not Black enough in (City).

Bethenny, a female who identifies as Black/African-American/Hispanic, went to what she describes as a diverse high school in the Chicago suburbs in Illinois. She recalled having all White friends but going to a few multicultural clubs.

I always thought, well diversity is everywhere, but really like, I never saw it as a big thing. Most of my friends were, well, all my friends were White. And I remember trying to go into a Black club or a Hispanic club. And the Hispanic club was fine, but the Black club, I wasn't Black enough. And, I didn't speak Ebonics, um, I had a hard time understanding them. And (laughter), and they were like, 'you are an Oreo. You just can't be in our club.' And so (laughs) I was like, 'oh, ok.' So I went to Latinos Unidos and it was fine, that was that.

Similar to Brandi's description of her negative encounters surrounding her multiple racial identities, Bethenny's language suggested that she was able to get over not being accepted as Black because she found a home with her Hispanic identity.

Coming to college at the research site, Brandi described her transition as harder than for "other people." In the context of her description of being a woman of mixed racial descent, her language suggests that the "other people" she is referring to are White.

Coming here is harder than you think. Than for other people. I didn't talk to anyone for the first year, even last year really. But, I guess now I'm comfortable. I don't have any stress over it [race] anymore because I don't see myself as a race anymore. I know I'm Black and I'm a college student and that's just how I see myself. I just did that this year, so I could start going out and meeting people so I would remember college.

Bethenny also described her transition to college when she talked about confronting stereotypes surrounding her racial identity. She described how she viewed her Black peers as accepting stereotypes in order to be "seen."

You see White people say, 'here's the stereotypes and I need you to conform to them.' And you see the rest of the people, the Black people saying, 'Ok, sure, I'll do that because that's the only way you will see who I am.' And then there's like the two percent maybe who will say, 'Mmmm, no, that's not who I am, you can like it or leave it.'" And you get an issue because you're not being Black enough and you're trying to be White and it's like, 'No, I'm trying to succeed,' so it's complicated.

Bethenny also described feeling rejected by her Black peers at college similar to the rejection she felt in high school when she tried to join the Black student club.

Then when I came to College and saw that there was only like five people of Black descent and one of them was (Name) and she looked at me like, 'I don't want to talk to you...' I was like, 'Ok,' cause I already had the experience of like, they don't want me. So when I met (Name) and I met (Name) and other people I was so hesitant. I was like, 'Well they look inviting, but I'll just see...' So I had this whole thing. I was like, 'I'm here to get an education, that's the only reason I'm here. I don't need to make any Black friends.' Even though that's what I really needed. I needed someone who was like myself. Hispanic people have all these different browns and it's fine, I still needed, I still needed *me*. ...So when I came here, I was just like, well there aren't any other brown people other than these Black people and I really needed to connect with them. Because everyone else does not look like me and I *need* someone who looks like me, who can relate to me. I need that.

Bethenny expressed the need to have peers who were of a similar racial identity. After being at college for a year, Bethenny started forming friendships with other Black students.

Well, like my sophomore year, yeah I'm pretty sure it was my sophomore year, every year it seems like there are more Black people and so like I started to um talk more and become friends with I guess Black people and I became very good friends with (name), (name), and a bunch of people that I would see on a regular basis and I would ask them about, like the weirdest questions that would have been like really normal, but I had no clue about. Like I had no clue what the hell a weave was (laughter) and I was like, 'woo!' That was not in the books!

Bethenny goes on to describe how she persisted in college as a woman of color.

I was really glad that like, the longer I stood, the more Black women I saw. And I was like, I really need to get to know these women because you are the ones that are going to be teaching me to, react to this. Um, so, I don't know, I just, for me I find it very comforting to just know that all my roommates are White and I love 'em to death, I really do. But there are times when I need familiar. I just need to be familiar with other people and that's where (name) comes around and I'll be like, 'I just need you to sit here with me. I just need to talk.' And it helps. But it's just one of those things where, you realize how little you have at College, how small your circle is, um, and you're like, ok well I need to make sure I'm in contact with everyone, making sure everything is fine because if one falls well then it seems like everyone is going to fall and leave. Transfer, fails out. It's one of those things where we need to keep an eye on each other, you know, and keep each other strong and accountable for staying here and getting the degree because that's the reason why we're here.

2c. Understanding identity

White students presented themselves as well-meaning White people while also exploring the ideas of White shame and acknowledging past discrimination while eschewing personal responsibility in the process of defining what it means to be White. When Taylor recalls an instance where her mother bought her a Black doll after hearing her say she didn't want to play with the Black kids on the playground, Taylor says that she no longer saw color, that she no longer viewed Black people as "different" but then says that, "you know you're not supposed to walk in the bad parts of town by yourself, but I just wish we could change all of that and make it on an even playing field I guess." Here, she refers to the "bad parts of town" as those inhabited by people from minority races. Camille says she wants to be someone who is more than "just another White jerk" that did this to us (Black people). She says she, "may not be able to fix everything that happened" but the discourse of the well-meaning person is privileged in her talk. Theresa voices shame for being White and the desire to be regarded as a well-meaning White person. She feels that "they're being judgmental of me, like I should apologize to them," and repeats, "I feel like I have to apologize to them."

Minority students described how they survived in predominantly White neighborhoods and schools. They described experiences of isolation and negative attitudes and stereotypes toward them and their racial identity. Brandi's

description of how she reacted to negative treatment focuses on persisting in a predominantly White environment. She acknowledged “feeling bad,” but that she “reacts differently than other people. I don’t cry about stuff.” Brandi says she was “built up” by “going from situation to situation” and that by the time she got to middle school it was “fine.”

Bethenny also talked about persisting in her experiences confronting negativity surrounding her racial identity. When describing her transition to college, she acknowledged that she interacted with White peers and confronted their negative perceptions of her and her racial identity, but that there were times when she needed to be in the presence of other Black women to gain a sense of community. She says, “I need to make sure I’m in contact with everyone, making sure everything is fine because if one falls well then it seems like everyone is going to fall and leave.”

*Summary of Racial Identity Development: Making Race Invisible
Versus Becoming Racial Beings*

Students from all of the racial backgrounds represented in the study shared personal examples of when they learned about either being identified as a specific race, or learning about “the other” as it related to race. The White students described race as something with which they had limited experience. Most of the White students did not know their family’s racial history and therefore expressed that they didn’t feel connected to the self as a person who belonged to a specific race. They did not talk about being White as part of their identity.

The students who identified as one or more racial minorities talked about race and their racial identity in terms of how they worked to minimize their sense of self as a racial being. For the minority students in the study, being “non-White” meant experiencing loneliness and isolation, whereas not thinking of themselves as a minority helped them to acclimate to the predominantly White college environment and focus on being “successful.”

*Theme 3: The Nature of Oppression: Dominant and
Subordinate Group Experiences With Oppression*

3a. Subordinate group experiences with oppression

Paul, a male student who identified as Black/African-American from urban Iowa talked about his mother's experience in a predominantly White school as worse than his own experience with discrimination at the same school. He also said that he understood many of the reflections of discrimination in the film he viewed as a stimulus to the interview questions.

Like, my mom went to a predominantly White school and it was like, she's told me it was like hell on earth for her, she was just discriminated and basically was kicked out of the school. And, like, coming from (City) and I went to school here, high school, and I would say it was a pretty diverse school and we weren't really faced with like, discrimination like that, I would say, um, but I definitely have experienced discrimination myself. But like, um, I understood a lot of the information that they were sharing.

When asked to share an example of experiencing discrimination, Paul recounted a trip to the college bookstore at the research site.

You know at the bookstore how they have the book buy-back thing. There is a police guy there and I entered into the bookstore and the policeman was at the table, towards the front. And there were a lot of people in there, I was aware of my surroundings. There were a lot of people. And I walked in and I walked to get a gift and I walked to an aisle and I was like, he was watching me. So, he like walked across to the other aisle to get a better view of me and I knew he was there looking at me because there were a lot of people there, but I was probably the only Black guy there and I knew I was being followed. And that was the bookstore here. Like I just knew it.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

I mean, it does affect you, but like I said, like my parents said you're going to have to be prepared for it and brush it off. I don't know what else I could have done. I don't know if I could have approached him and like, I don't know if I have that in me to do that. And there's been other stuff like that.

Kenya, a Black/African-American female from California shared an experience from her childhood, when she witnessed her mother being denied housing for her and her siblings.

Yeah, so um, my mom had just had my baby brother, he wasn't even a year old yet and we were going from (City, State) to (City, State) and my mom spoke to this landlord over the phone and he was like, 'yeah sure, you can move in, have your deposit and everything,' and then when we got there, he saw that you know, oh you're not White, like you sound over the phone, he was just kind of like, you know, 'you can't move in.' So, here's this single mother with four children, one a newborn, sitting on the curb like now what am I supposed to do? So we ended up homeless, living in our car until we were finally able to get into a shelter and then into another place to live, so we ended up missing school.

When her family did get moved and in school, Kenya recalls encountering racial slurs and described these experiences as something she had to deal with as part of the process of acclimating to a new school.

Oh yeah, it's something that, we dealt with on a regular basis, you know. We were called the "N" word in school you know, we didn't ever really have to deal with it for such a long time. I mean, it was like, 'oh that girl called me the N word today in school, but this is something you have to deal with for weeks and weeks until you could finally get situated and understand what went on.

Kenya also uses the word "but" as a countering strategy within the competing discourses of experiencing and minimizing oppression.

Expanding on the types of encounters she had at school, Kenya described being made fun of because of her physical appearance.

Oh yeah, I mean we'd get made fun of because of how we looked, because of our hair, you know my mom would braid our hair all the time so kids would say, 'oh you have worms coming out of your head, you have snakes coming out of your hair.' Kids were just really mean, but I mean, the stuff that they did was very minute compared to what we dealt with then.

Brandi also described an experience where she encountered peers who did not accept her because of her race.

...I was never really a partier in high school, um I actually met a couple people, they were guys...they were like, 'you should come to this party with us.' And we went over there, it was like a basement party and we went down and this guy was like, 'what's the Black girl doing here?' I was like, 'What?' Um, and after that I never went to any parties again because it was uncomfortable.

Interviewer: And how would you describe your experience on campus now?

Things still flare up here and there, but that happens.

Portia described her experience coming to college at the research site.

In my classes, I'm lucky if there's any other minorities, but I get a good education at College. I like my teachers, I like the students in my classes, I like you (looking at Caroline), but you have to be open minded and just willing to change and just get past all of the negativity.

3b. Dominant group experiences with oppression

The students in the interviews who identified as White/Non-Hispanic also shared examples where they observed African-American students being the target of negative stereotypes. Theresa, a student who identifies as White/Non-Hispanic from urban Iowa, observes in an elementary school as part of her Education major and witnessed an interaction between two students.

I just was thinking about something I found out today. I observe in a second grade classroom and I thought this was interesting because it's so early in their life and I thought racism was, you know, on the way out. I heard about this today, there's one Black boy in the classroom, and there is one other student whose father is African-American and whose brother is, um, dark-skinned and he's African-American but he's completely White-skinned. He has all the features, but he considers himself White. And I guess the other day the Black boy was upset and this kid came up to him and said, "Oh you're angry like all Black men are." And that shocked me that he would say that at such a young age. It's so young and he already has stereotypes...

Caroline, a student who identified as White/Non-Hispanic from rural Iowa, shared what she believed about the nature of racism and prejudice.

One thing I would say, just about racism, or prejudice in general, is that people generalize. They'll have one bad encounter with this person whose say, Mexican or Puerto Rican or whatever, and they'll just write them all off. Cause like when I went home over Easter, my grandfather on my dad's side, I was talking and I had taken some of my friends home just to visit and one of the friends I took, he's Puerto Rican and my grandmother was like, 'Oh, you better watch, you know those Puerto Ricans...' and I was like, 'what are you talking about?' (laughter from all). And she was like, when she was in grade school they would write letters to kids in Puerto Rico, she grew up in (City, State) and I guess the boy that she was writing to one day like asked her to send him a pen or a pencil or something because they didn't have very good writing utensils and so she did and she was fine with that, and she said, but then he just kept asking for more and more stuff. And I was like, 'But my friend doesn't ask me for anything' (laughs). And so that was kind of a shock for me, for my grandmother to say that, after like seventy years ago. So, I mean, I didn't bring him with me to see her...it might have been interesting. And I did take him to my mom's side of the family. And like my grandparents loved

him, like they thought he was a great kid and everything. But my mom actually told me that since he was a friend, my grandparents are fine with him, but she said if you would ever see him more than that, or date him, they wouldn't agree with, say, mixing races.

When asked how she felt about the idea that her parents wouldn't agree with her dating a person who was a different race, she explained her struggle.

Um, I didn't really like that, mostly because I feel like if there's a boy I meet of a different race I should be able to bring him home to my family and they should like him and they shouldn't judge him on what race he is but on the type of person he is. So, I think my family should know that I'm not just going to bring some random guy home...

Gretchen, a White/Non-Hispanic student from Iowa agreed with Caroline, saying that her dad was "old school" when it comes to cross-race relationships.

That's kind of how I feel about my parents. They've never come out and said it but I think that there would be judgment passed. I don't know, my dad's kind of old school, like he would have a problem with it. And, I don't know, my mom would probably be fine. But at the same time it's like, I have felt like that for a while. It's just something about my parents; I feel like that's how they would be.

Camille offered a similar sentiment about her parents' attitudes about race.

I always wish I would say something or that I knew what to say because I also don't agree with that. Hearing them say that and then not saying anything back makes it like I agree with them and I don't. Um, definitely my parents were not as much. I think my parents got a little bit of that attitude but if it is present, it's not, I mean I don't think it's necessarily that they really think that, it's just the way they grew up. It's just, it stuck, you know.

Interviewer: So, how did they teach you about these attitudes?

I think, I'm not sure if it was intentional, there was never an attitude of this group is different and should be treated differently, there was never that attitude.

Both Camille and Gretchen acknowledge oppression while minimizing participation in the system of oppression. Theresa offered another reflection on prejudice and race.

I thought it was interesting how the one girl said that prejudice was built up in the home, and uh, um, I was thinking about my house and I know that twice with my younger siblings someone would come to the door who was African American trying to sell something and they would say, 'I'm sorry we don't buy things from Black people' and shut the door. And my mom freaked out because she has never said that to them before, she's never put a negative connotation on Black people, but they still reacted that way. And so that's something that I've been trying to figure out. And

we had the keynote speaker come and talk about the N word and that definitely intrigued me because he asked where does this negative connotation come from and a lot of people said well it must come from the home...

Interviewer: But you're thinking, well my mom never said that....

And so, yeah, like she made them open the door and apologize.

Interviewer: And how old were they at the time?

They were probably like five or six.

Taylor offered a story from her childhood after hearing Theresa share her story about the African-Americans at her door.

The same story stuck out for me and like, how much I want to show them that not everyone feels that way anymore. I kind of had a similar situation...I don't remember this but apparently I was playing on the playground when I was little and this little Black girl wanted to come and play with me and I didn't want to. And my mom had no clue where it came from because you know I grew up in an area with nothing, no diversity at all. So she immediately went out and bought me a Black baby doll. And from then on I didn't see them, I don't see them as different. I mean, sometimes attitudes are different and you know you're not supposed to walk in the bad parts of town by yourself, but I just wish we could change all of that and make it on an even playing field I guess.

Michael responded to Theresa's earlier reflection about the second grade boy.

It sounds to me, like in the case of the second grader, if you know his father is Black and he's Black essentially, then you know he's probably growing up in a household that's racially aware, and um, you know so I think that may influence his ideas. But more generally I kind of wonder in these environments where there's not diversity and there's not a discussion of it either, that you know, just that um, children just kind of forced to make up their own perceptions of race. I think that a lot of really implicit messages from the media factor heavily into their ideas.

Andy, a male student who identifies as White/Non-Hispanic, talked about his high school when he reflected on the film.

The high school I went to was (HS Name) and it was predominantly White too, but we had a good mix of Africans and Mexicans as well. I didn't notice any harsh discrimination but there were divisions between people that were noticeable.

Theresa described how she felt when talking to her peers from different racial backgrounds.

I guess when I talk to people of different races, I feel like they're being judgmental of me, like I should apologize to them. So I'm not hesitant talking to them because of how I feel about them, I'm hesitant to talk to them because of how I think they feel about me. I feel like I have to apologize to them. Just like I should say over and over again that we don't feel like that anymore. That I don't feel like that to them. I'm just always thinking, "What do they think right now? Of what I'm answering, and is that going to change how they view me."

3c. Understanding oppression

Students from both White/Non-Hispanic and Black/Multiple Race identities talked about oppression either from a personal stance or from an observer position. Paul talks about discrimination as a real part of his everyday interactions but that his parents taught him to "be prepared for it." Later, he says that he doesn't get used to it but that he "brushes it off." Taylor indirectly acknowledges participation in oppression when she recalls feeling like she wished she could tell the African-Americans at her door that "not everyone feels like that anymore" without directly naming what "that" is. When Kenya recalls her mom being denied housing based on her race, she says the experience made her family stronger and described her mother telling her that "It happens," and to learn from it and move on.

Theresa states that, "We don't feel like that anymore" when talking about past instances of oppression. Here, Theresa is acknowledging a shared cultural history of oppression but also categorizes White people as not participating in oppressive practices in the present day. Other White students in the study used language that attempted to place oppression as a historical practice, but not one that is practiced in present day. This language was heard in all of the focus groups containing White students, even after they would listen to their peers from different races describe present-day experiences of oppression.

Summary of The Nature of Oppression: Dominant and Subordinate Experiences With Oppression

Participants' shared experiences of oppression from the perspective of either a member of the dominant or subordinate racial group. White students shared stories of

observing discrimination or discriminating against a peer of a different race. The most common places where the White students encountered or participated in discrimination were in the home or at school. White students also reflected on times where they observed family members talking about other races in derogatory terms, conveying negative attitudes toward topics such as interracial dating or marriage. When White students shared instances of oppression that occurred in U.S. history, they followed the story by stating that they (White people) were “not that way anymore,” or said that they wanted their peers of different races to know that “*they* didn’t feel that way anymore,” when referring to historical oppression.

Students who identified as one or more racial minority shared examples of times when they were targets of discrimination or oppression. The most common place where instances of discrimination or oppression occurred was at school, though one student shared an experience of discrimination related to her mother trying to secure housing. Most of the minority students described conversations with their parents where they were told that school would not be particularly welcoming, or that they should expect to encounter discrimination. When the minority students shared stories of oppression in the focus group setting, they worked to minimize the negative effects of being the target of discrimination, stating things like, “It made me stronger,” or “stuff happens.”

Overall Summary of Findings

Analyzing the results of the interviews revealed three themes relevant to the research question: *Interpretations of the American Dream, Racial identity development: The invisibility of race versus becoming racial beings, and The Nature of oppression: dominant versus subordinate experiences with oppression.* Conducting a thematic analysis of the data allowed me to use the participants’ voices to describe the themes in rich detail. Analyzing the data through the lens of Critical Race Theory resulted in identifying common themes related to race, racial identity, and a shared U.S. history related to race. These themes seemed to be salient for students from both dominant and

marginalized racial identities. Within the framework of Critical Race Theory, students' experiences served as stories and counter-stories about race in their individual lives and in this particular research setting.

Interpretations of the American dream were characterized by students sharing their ideas of what constitutes being American. White students acknowledged that there were established civilizations prior to European immigration to what is now the United States. They privileged the idea of an American as a White/Non-Hispanic who realized the American Dream by describing it as "the best," or "the thing to be." In their reflections on this theme, students seemed to dismiss the notion that not every immigrant group enjoyed the same opportunities and therefore failed to fully acknowledge minority group experiences. History was connected to their understanding of White people achieving racial dominance and thus not needing to cling to a cultural or racial identity to succeed.

Students discussed their *racial identity development* when talking about race. It appeared in this study that the White students saw themselves as well-meaning individuals who treat everyone the same. In some cases, White students in this study expressed the desire to show minorities that "we're [White people] not like that anymore." Students who identified as one or more racial minority identities described their experiences as persisting in their environments by making race invisible. They touched on themes of discrimination, identity confusion, and negative stereotypes surrounding race, but consistently returned to the idea of making their race invisible as a way to persist and be successful in college.

The *nature of oppression* was described by both the White students and students who identified as a racial minority. The themes of resistance, color-blindness, and privilege were prevalent in students' descriptions of race-related events in their lives. Students who identified as members of a minority group described experiences being the target of unjust treatment but usually concluded a counter-story with phrases such as

“You just get past it,” or “Yeah, we had a hard time, but we got through it.” The White students in the study described experiences of observing or participating in unjust treatment. Both White students and those in the study that identified as one or more racial minority seemed to present themselves as color blind. A White student explained that she “doesn’t see color anymore,” and Bethenny explained that once she got to college she didn’t want to see Black or White, she just “wanted to succeed.”

The data collected in the present study included students’ stories about their family history, their personal experiences with oppression, and reflections on who they are as members of a particular racial group. The students’ responses were, on one level, responses to the stimulus, *A Place at the Table*. On another level their responses included information on the ways that they experienced race in their daily lives and the way that their behaviors, values, and interactions with others influenced their conversations in the interview setting. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the findings as they connect to current literature.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' conversations about race (defined as a social construction of differences among various groups of people) at a Predominantly White Institution. This study included semi-structured focus groups with 16 undergraduate students from various racial backgrounds. I analyzed the data from student interviews and identified three primary themes: *Interpretations of the American Dream*, *Racial identity development: The invisibility of race versus becoming racial beings*, and *The nature of oppression: Dominant versus subordinate experiences of oppression*. I returned to these three themes to discuss my findings within the context of current literature on Critical Race Theory, the racial diversity climate, racial identity development, and facilitating dialogues on race. For the purposes of analysis of the findings, I returned to the research question: What are the sociocultural influences on undergraduate students' conversations on race at a Predominantly White Institution?

Findings from the interview data suggest that race does not occur solely in the moment of a particular conversation or incidence. Rather, there are three sociocultural influences on undergraduates' conversations on race (see Figure 1). First, students' conversations are influenced by the collective history related to race in the United States. Second, students are also influenced by their personal experiences related to race, particularly discrimination. Finally, students' conversations on race are influenced by the way they describe themselves as racial beings. Thus, students bring their historical and experiential memory related to race, as well as how they identify as racial beings to present conversations on race and reactions to race-based incidences on campus.

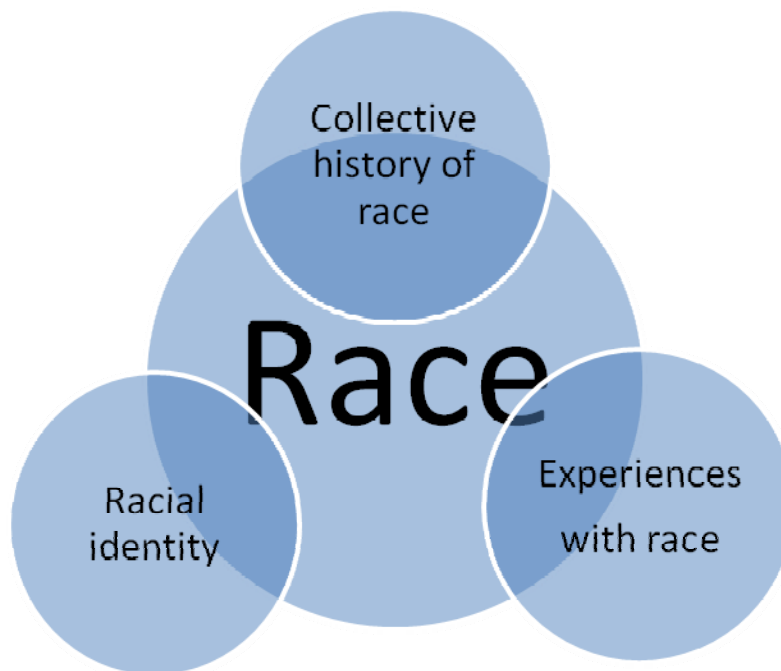


Figure 1. Sociocultural influences on undergraduates' conversations on race

Critical Race Theory informed the way I approached the analysis of students' stories in the present study and helped to reveal possible sociocultural influences on the way they made meaning of race. For the students who identified as a member of a minority group, sharing personal stories of discrimination or oppression offered a possible counter view to the dominant perspective on race at a predominantly White institution. White students in this study had the opportunity to hear everyday instances of oppression experienced by their peers who identified as one or more minority races (Delgado, 1990; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005).

The principle finding from this study was that race continues to be a difficult and complex concept that students grapple with when prompted to describe its meaning. The questions about race elicited responses from students where they worked to render it invisible as a part of both their sense of self and the environment in which they live. White students appeared to use this strategy primarily to disassociate themselves from past discrimination on the part of White people in general or as a way to convince themselves and their peers that they no longer see race as an issue. Students who

identified with one or more racial minorities seemed to use this strategy as a means to minimize their experiences with discrimination and oppression and to cope in a predominantly White environment.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of findings from the relevant themes in the participants' process of making meaning of race and the sociocultural influences on their conversations about race. To discuss the principle finding of this study, I will describe the following: Differences in the ways that students from dominant and subordinate groups talk about race, the ways they rendered race invisible, and the influence of the practices, values, beliefs and interactions with others on their conversations on race.

Talking About Race: Differences Among Various Racial Groups

White students talking about race

White students de-personalized their experiences with race. For the White students in the study, race seemed to be about other people. In most instances, they did not talk about themselves with regard to race unless they were triggered to talk about their heritage. One of the interview questions asked students to react to particular stories about race within the interview stimulus, *A Place at the Table*. I did not ask them to describe how it felt to be a White student, or a member of a racial minority on campus. This open-ended question was intended to allow the students to approach race as an idea regardless of their own racial identity. This open-ended question was also an attempt to place all students—regardless of racial identity—within the conversation about race.

Literature on White privilege and White racial identity in particular, suggest that White students do not typically think of themselves as racial beings (Pope, 2000; Zetzer, 2004; Ponterotto, 2006). White students in this study focused on the stories that addressed one of the primary themes in the film—the American Dream—as a way to position themselves as a member of the White race within history without necessarily describing themselves as racial beings. In this study, students who identified as White talked about immigrants from many countries arriving in the United States and

“becoming White” as an avenue to achieving a position of power. The White students described “White” as “the thing to be,” establishing the social and cultural norm against which all races would be measured in order to attain The American Dream.

Their responses related to the theme of *The American Dream* seemed consistent with research on the concept of Whiteness in the way they positioned themselves within the narrative of being an American. Frankenburg describes Whiteness as a multidimensional construct.

First, Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of racial privilege. Second, it is a standpoint, a place from which White people look at themselves, at others, and at society. Third, Whiteness is a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1).

When the White students in the study discussed the advantages of being White to avoid the struggle that accompanied being what they described as “they” or “them”, they seemed to position themselves in Frankenburg’s location of advantage (1993). For the White students, unfamiliarity with one’s racial or ethnic background appeared to be almost an alluring aspect of the American Dream—that he or she could come from many backgrounds and meld into what is now referred to as “American.” This behavior also seemed to reinforce Frankenburg’s concept of Whiteness as a vantage point from which White individuals can view the other and make statements about themselves and society at large (Frankenburg, 1993).

Race, and its relationship to power and privilege, has been explored in the literature on Whiteness and White Racial Identity (Frankenburg, 1993; Helms, 1995). White students in the study displayed attitudes consistent with the literature on White privilege. A central component of identifying with the White race is the implicit power and privilege associated with being White (McIntosh, 2003). Because membership in the White race is presented as the norm, Whites have the ability to forego examining these concepts in one’s daily life (Perry, 2002; Knowles & Peng, 2005), despite the fact that racial identity technically encompasses the White race (Roediger, 2002). White

participants' descriptions of race seemed consistent with this implicit privilege that has been explored in the literature, particularly when they focused on race as a concept from the past and that did not have a particular impact on their present day experiences in college.

Minority students talking about race

All but two of the minority students, when asked how the stories in the film made them think about race, seemed to focus on personal experiences or those of their immediate family. While the White students in the study made general statements and observations about the experiences of the other, the minority students did not use this opportunity to call on historical issues or the concept of The American Dream. The students who identified as a member of one or more minority races seemed to use the opportunity to share personal narratives, even when in the company of White students who made more general statements and observations about race.

Questions about race elicited responses among the minority students that were deeply personal in nature. Many described painful memories of the first time they were called a racial slur, excluded from playing with children on the playground in elementary school, or confronted negative stereotypes based on race when they arrived at college. The minority students' narratives were similar to other stories that minority students have shared in the body of literature on Critical Race Theory (Feagin, 1992; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). One of the goals of researchers using Critical Race Theory is to give minority students the space to share their everyday experiences of oppression within the current structure of power, privilege, and oppression (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Students in this study seemed to feel comfortable sharing their stories in this setting, suggesting that providing space can be an effective strategy for illuminating the issue of race in a dialogue setting.

Rendering Race Invisible in Conversations

Invisibility as a privilege defense mechanism

It appeared that the White participants in this study employed defenses when talking about experiences of oppression that seem to confirm earlier research on privileged identity exploration (Watt, 2009). In Watt's study of graduate students, the defenses of *principium*, *false envy*, and *benevolence* were most prevalent among students who were in a position of privilege. In the present study, the most interesting defenses called upon by the White participants were *rationalization*, *minimization*, *benevolence*, and *intellectualization* when talking about the experiences of minority groups, both in historical and present day instances. When Caroline rationalized the early immigrants' experiences of oppression by saying they had "false perceptions" of the opportunities that would be available to them. Gretchen talked about how the immigrants created the problem for themselves because they created a false picture of what America was for minority immigrants, again rationalizing their experiences of oppression. When talking about the present-day, White students used phrases like, "We're not like that anymore" in an apparent move to minimize the present state of race relations as compared to the history of oppression. Other students, like Michael, talked about his charity work with recent immigrants, using benevolence as his defense against exploring present-day oppression.

White students who participated in the study seemed to depersonalize their reaction to the stimulus when presenting the concept of race as having to do with "the other" by employing the *intellectualism* defense. They talked in detail about how White immigrants gained power and articulated possible reasons why White was the dominant group, but did not offer descriptions of themselves as racial beings except when prompted to talk about their heritage. The White students in the present study also seemed to avoid talking about race. Rather, they seemed to favor presenting facts about the media and schools as contributing to present-day issues with race but countered descriptions of race-

related issues with statements such as “but we don’t feel that way anymore,” or language that minimized the presence of racism in particular in their present environment.

Invisibility as a minimization of oppression

Students who identified as bi-racial, Black/African-American and Hispanic talked in great detail about their experiences with discrimination. These responses indicated their willingness to talk about race, including those aspects that could be perceived as traumatic or painful. However, when minority students talked about these painful experiences, they countered it with phrases such as “I don’t see myself as a race anymore.” These phrases seemed to exemplify the way they made race invisible as a way to cope with oppression, especially as a way to focus on being successful in college. The minority students shared experiences that seemed consistent with studies described in Chapter Two that highlighted minority students’ negative experiences related to race.

Minority students also reported racial incidences that echoed previous literature about minority student perceptions of the racial diversity climate (Hochschild, 1995) as negatively affecting all aspects of their college experience. For the minority students in the study, the more they focused attention away from their racial identity, the more they were able to focus on their academic and social experiences. For the minority students in the study, color and its related physical distinctions, was at once a way to describe the self and something to be pushed to the background in order to persist in a predominantly White environment.

The students who identified as a racial minority also worked to minimize their experiences of oppression when talking about race. Their stories of experiences with discrimination or oppression were, without exception, countered with language that minimized the pain and negative impact on their sense of self in order to describe themselves as “stronger” because of their experiences. When these stories were viewed alongside the literature on Privileged Identity Exploration (Watt, 2009), there seemed to be ways that minority students used defenses to cope with oppression in much the same

way that the research has illuminated defenses used by privileged groups when confronted with similar issues (Watt, 2009).

Sociocultural Influences on Conversations on Race

Influences on subordinate group members

Minority students confront race and racism on the college campus and must make decisions on how they will deal with incidents of racism (Sedlacek, 1999). The historical aspect of the campus climate for diversity, including the extent to which the campus has historically excluded minority students, comes to bear on present-day minority student experiences in college (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). When the minority students in the study described race, they did so in the context of how they dealt with race on an individual level in various settings. They described the almost daily decisions on how they addressed race and racism much like their predecessors have dealt with historical discrimination on the college campus.

Students who identified as having one or more racial minority identities talked about the way they saw themselves as members of American society, their interactions with cross-racial and same-race peers, and the extent to which they were able to persist in their environments as a person who identifies as a racial minority. These students talked in great detail about personal experiences with discrimination and how the practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others influenced how they saw themselves and the how they approached the college environment. In the present study, the minority students' descriptions of their transitions from grade school to college included confronting racial stereotypes, minimizing their negative experiences, and using the process of identifying with their race and then setting that identity aside helped to motivate them to persist in school. Many of the examples of discrimination they shared were consistent with the literature on racial microaggressions, or the common verbal and behavioral actions that result in negative attitudes towards minority groups (Sue, Lin, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Students described the negative impact of these

microaggressions on their sense of self and seemed to contribute to their desire to make race invisible.

The Black/African-American students in particular shared experiences that were similar to the college experiences of other Black/African-American students that have been documented for decades (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). These stories seemed to reinforce the idea that for the minority students in this particular study, college was not particularly a place where they could embrace the self as racial beings and succeed in college.

Influences on dominant group members

The White students in the study described instances in their childhood and at college where they appeared to rely on stereotypes of diverse others in order to make meaning of race. They also recounted instances where they had conversations with family members who used stereotypes to make judgments of minority groups without having personal interactions with individuals from a different race. It is noted in the literature on college students that many students who come to college from predominantly White communities get their information about students who identify as a member of a minority race solely from “media-generated stereotypes” (Elias & Jones, 2002, p. 8). Electronic media and its power to make images, language and culture accessible across racial lines makes it possible for White students, for example, to have access to African-American hip-hop culture while not becoming familiar with any other aspects of African-American culture or having interactions with individual Black students.

White students in the study also described college as the first time they talked with peers who were of a different race. This experience is noted in the research on White students’ interactions with diverse others (Umbach & Kuh, 2006) and also mirrors the process of White Identity Development that has been noted in the literature (Helms, 1984; Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 1995). Many of the White students said that their interactions with diverse peers caused them to question the beliefs their families taught

them. In particular, some of the White students described behavior aligned with the movement from *naïveté* to *acceptance* in Helm's model. Students were able to articulate what they perceived to be the values attached to the White race through their descriptions of The American Dream.

A few of the White students in the study reported that they had follow-up conversations with their peers or family members following the interview in an attempt to learn more about their family's history, which is consistent with descriptions of the *resistance* stage in Helm's model in which students try to unravel the ways they had previously thought about being White. This seems an important precursor to the next stage of the model, *redefinition*, in which Whites begin to take responsibility for the role that Whites play in the system of power, privilege, and oppression.

Conclusion

Students in the study approached the complex and difficult issue of race in the interview setting by sharing their stories or counter-stories related to race. Questions about race elicited responses that invoked their ideas of privilege, power, and oppression, and described the influences on the way they thought about race. White students described the idea of diverse individuals coming together for common opportunities at the center of their discussion on race, focusing on the process of becoming "White." Both White students and the students who identified as a member of a minority group emphasized the idea of making race an invisible part of their identity and minimized the self as a racial being.

Students who identified as White/Non-Hispanic seemed to privilege the invisibility of race in order to downplay or avoid their role in the system of oppression and also seemed to exhibit defense mechanisms consistent with research on Privileged Identity Exploration (Watt, 2009). The most interesting defenses displayed in the conversations with the students in the present study included *rationalization*, *minimization*, *benevolence*, and *intellectualization*. It is possible that students who

identified as one or more racial minority identities emphasized the invisibility of race as a way to minimize their experiences of oppression. Additionally, racial minority students talked about race as a way to describe how they persisted in predominantly White environments such as college through their counter-narratives that have been explored in previous literature employing Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Students in this study shared their experiences related to race by describing their individual experiences related to race, by commenting on the collective history of race in the U.S., and by describing the extent to which they appeared to view themselves as racial beings. Findings from this particular group of students suggest that race does not occur just in a particular moment on campus. Rather, race and race-related incidences are influenced by students' individual histories related to race, the collective racial history in the U.S., and the extent to which they see themselves as racial beings. Providing dialogue settings similar to the current research study could apply Critical Race Theory in a practical setting and give students the space to share stories and counter-stories related to race.

The next chapter will describe some implications for student affairs practice and some possible ways to continue the research on race-based dialogues, both in the field of student affairs research and in interpersonal communication. Included are suggestions for facilitating dialogues on race, possible areas of future research, and ways in which the present study supports prior research in the field of diversity and dialogues on race.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The purpose of the study was to explore the sociocultural influences of undergraduate students' dialogues on race at a Predominantly White Institution. The previous chapter analyzed the findings of five semi-structured interviews with 16 undergraduate students organized into three themes: *Interpretations of The American Dream*, *Racial Identity Development*, and *The Nature of Oppression*. This study focused on the ways that undergraduate students make meaning of race and how their behaviors, values, and interactions with other influence the way they talk about race with their peers. Findings include the idea that race does not occur just in the moment of a particular conversation or incidence. The participants in the present study constructed the meaning of race around their history and the collective U.S. history related to race. Participants also construct the meaning of race in the context of their personal experiences with race, particularly discrimination. Finally, students' construction of race is influenced by the way they describe themselves as racial beings.

Race is a social construction that is learned through relationships with family, peers, and other influencers throughout one's lifespan (Harro, 2007). Race relations in the United States are complex and students from different racial groups have lived different realities. In addition, many have had limited opportunities to interact and have dialogues on issues such as race (Umbach & Kuh, 2006), the result of which can be developing defense mechanisms to cope with potential conflict about tension-filled topics such as race (Watt, 2009). Students in the study shared their perspectives, experiences, and ideas about race consistent with the research on the ways that society and culture inform the way that they view themselves and others, and with the idea that systems of oppression are pervasive, complex, and influence all areas of one's life (Bell, 1987).

Colleges and universities in the United States have made strides to improve structural diversity—the physical presence of a critical mass of underrepresented

minority students—through affirmative action and other minority enrollment initiatives (Milem, 2003). What has not occurred is a sufficiently concerted and sustained effort to find ways, “of not just enrolling, but educating a diverse population of students” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, 143). Isolated, racist incidences—as the ones I have described in Chapter One—continue to occur on college campuses across the United States and prompt institutional leaders to grapple with the best ways to address the issue of race in a way that will address the systemic nature of race and racism and not merely as reactions to specific events.

When students from various races interact on college campuses in the United States, they bring their experiences with and perceptions of the other race to the conversation. These experiences and perceptions influence the way they engage in dialogues with peers. These varying and often competing ideas about and perspectives on race inform the way they make meaning of race and their role in systemic oppression. Therefore, it is important for administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners to gain a greater understanding of these influences. A greater understanding can contribute to more effective dialogues on race by engaging in conversations with a more complex sense of how the underlying aspects of the dialogue are connected to systemic racism.

Understanding the practices, beliefs, values, behaviors, and interactions with others that influence the way students make meaning of race is of particular salience for students and the way they view themselves as racial beings, and as members of a system of oppression in contemporary society. While current research demonstrates that increased interactions with diverse others has wide-ranging educational benefits and that intentional efforts to promote cross-racial engagement are an important aspect of promoting a positive climate for racial diversity, studying the sociocultural influences on students conversations on race can help practitioners to identify additional strategies for promoting diversity and inclusion. Pedagogical strategies that focus on a more inclusive teaching of history and society in the curriculum and co-curricular programming, for

example, can be informed by a microscopic analysis of the sociocultural influences on students' understanding of race.

This type of analysis can help students in the process of developing their racial identity and viewing themselves as anti-racist, empowered, racial beings. Models of racial identity development for White, Black, bi-racial, and multi-racial individuals acknowledge the impact of one's environment in shaping their early sense of self. Studying dialogues on race through the lens of racial identity development can be another tool for helping students to see the role that their pre-college experiences have on their present-day interactions with peers from races different than their own.

This chapter offers three implications for practice to address the reality of race on campus. The implications for practice include engaging in further scholarship on race as means of raising consciousness around issues of race, providing training and support for facilitators of dialogues on race-based issues, and including White students in the conversation on race while maintaining positive counter spaces for minority students on campus.

Engaging in Scholarship on Race

The body of research on race as it relates to college students and campus climates for diversity is still relatively new. Addressing the reality of race on campus as a persistent issue with implications for the ways in which all students learn and prepare for life after graduation, requires further research. Critical Race Theory is attempting to add to the body of research by documenting minority students' narratives as a counter-story to the dominant group experiences on campus. Scholar-practitioners can, as Derrick Bell suggests, work forcefully to end racism (1987). Studying the issue of race will only come to the foreground of higher education research when the body of evidence demonstrates that working to end systemic racism on campus is in the best interest of all members of the campus community and that the cost of continuing to operate from a system that places one group at an advantage over all other groups is too great to ignore (Bell, 1987).

Facilitating Dialogues on Race

Institutions of higher education are being called upon to address issues of race on campus as they relate to college access, campus climate, and effective teaching and learning (Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, Allen, and Milem, 1998). Campus administrators who answer this call often begin by initiating programs that seek to open dialogues on diversity issues including race (Chang, 2002). Dialogue has the potential to transform campus climates into positive spaces for diversity. These transformative efforts require that participants undergo changes in attitudes, beliefs, and the way they make meaning of their own position in the power, privilege, and oppression structures at the institution and in the larger community (Hurtado, 1992; 1996).

This study examined the sociocultural influences of undergraduate students' conversations on race at a Predominantly White Institution by applying Critical Race Theory to analyze students' stories and counter-stories within five semi-structured focus groups with sixteen students at the research site. Critical Race Theory looks at the ways in which stories and counter-stories can transform the way that individuals and groups approach race as a persistent issue in contemporary society. Applying Critical Race Theory in other dialogue settings, such as Intergroup dialogue, for example, involves sustained contact over time with the same group of students which may allow for more deeper exploration into the possible transformation that could occur in participants' consciousness-raising behaviors. Telling and hearing narratives from both dominant and marginalized individuals may allow meanings to arise that give voice to previously marginalized ideas about race. This particular model would be appropriate given research that suggests that storytelling is best situated in settings over time because when the dominant group hears unfamiliar counter stories, they can be rejected initially because of the discomfort of confronting race, power, and oppression (Delgado, 1990).

Expanding Dialogues with Cross-Racial Groups

Student affairs practitioners can work within larger campus diversity efforts to construct cross-race groups when discussing issues of race and racism. Critical Race Theory can be applied in these settings to facilitate intentional and authentic dialogues on race. Discussions about experiences related to race can be expanded to include White students' experiences with race without drawing attention away from some of the unique needs of students who have been historically underserved on predominantly White campuses. Rather, including White students can help transform the campus climate for diversity by placing all students, regardless of race, in the conversation on race. This may contribute to a decentering of Whiteness on campus as the norm.

Conclusion

Studying students' dialogues on race in the present study illuminated the contrasting themes present in their interpretations of the American Dream, the ways in which students viewed themselves as racial beings, and the nature of oppression according to their experiences as members of the dominant or subordinate group. The dialogues were informed by the students' practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others prior to coming to college. Students from both dominant and subordinate groups seemed to work to render race invisible in their everyday lives.

When talking about The American Dream, they rendered race as a thing in the past, either as a vehicle to attain membership in the dominant group or as a thing to cling to in order to maintain identity. Conversations on racial identity development privileged the idea of race as invisible while recognizing the self as a racial being was secondary. White students seemed to try to make race invisible in order to eschew responsibility for past experiences of oppression and to deny or downplay present systems of oppression. Students who identified as racial minorities also seemed to privilege the invisibility of race in order to minimize their experiences of oppression and as a way to describe their efforts to persist at a predominantly White institution.

This section considered the findings of this study and recommended implications for practice for student affairs practitioners in higher education. Students from various racial identities contribute to the campus climate for racial diversity. Evidence exists that experiences with diverse others in college have educational benefits (Gurin, 1999). Student affairs practitioners can help students learn how to have conversations on race in ways that illuminate the influences of their pre-college practices, beliefs, values, and interactions with others on the way they make meaning of race.

This qualitative study using Critical Race Theory and a qualitative analysis examined the communication process by which race is constructed, or given meaning, in students' talk. Students who participated in this study described race in rich detail. Findings include the notion that conversations on race can be influenced by a shared racial history in the U.S., individual experiences with race, and racial identity. Influences such as these converge when students have dialogues on race or when race-based incidents occur on campus. These findings suggest that practitioners need more information on what students bring to the table when they engage in dialogues on race. Effectively facilitating dialogues on race can help to improve the campus climate for diversity and help students to see race as a social construction rather than an individual experience or something located in the past but invisible in the present day.

APPENDIX A

EMAIL INVITATION TO STUDENTS

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a conversation on race with your peers. Talking about race is an important but often difficult topic, and I am interested in learning more about your opinions and perspectives.

More specifically, I am working on my doctoral dissertation entitled, *Sociocultural Influences on Undergraduate Students' Dialogues about Race*. I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you in a group of your peers. Involvement in the study will include approximately 90 minutes of your time in an in-person film viewing and interview, followed by an E-mail conversation and one online discussion. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email so that we may set up a time to meet.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Sherri Erkel

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form is designed to provide you with information about this study. The Principal Investigator will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions.

Title of Project: Sociocultural Influences on Undergraduate Students' Dialogues about Race at a Predominantly White Institution.

Principal Investigator(s): Sherri Erkel
Mailing Address: 518 West Locust Street, Davenport, IA 52803 (xxx) xxx-xxxx
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Tracy Schuster-Matlock, 518 West Locust Street, Davenport, IA 52803 (563) 333-6049; Dr. Sherry K. Watt, The University of Iowa, College of Education.

I hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in an authorized research project in association with St. Ambrose University. I understand the purpose of this research is to engage in a conversation about race with my peers. I understand that I will be asked to watch a 40-minute documentary titled *A Place at the Table*, followed by a focus group interview that may last up to 1 hour and will be audio taped, to write an E-mail response to follow-up questions three days following the interview, and an online discussion with my peers one week following the interview.

I understand that I may experience some discomfort in answering the questions. Although the discomfort I experience in answering the questions is expected to be minimal, I am encouraged to contact the counseling center at the university (or other mental health professional) if I experience discomfort.

The benefits of participating in this project may include a better understanding of racial diversity as it relates to my personal experiences and perspectives. I understand that I will not be compensated for participating and that participation is voluntary.

I understand that all information obtained from me will be kept confidential in a locked in a digital file on a password-protected computer in the principal researcher's office. Once the interview is transcribed, I will be contacted by the principal investigator to verify the transcript of the interview. The raw data will be kept for 10 years and then destroyed by July 1, 2021.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate in any procedure or to refuse to answer any question at any time without prejudice to me. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled.

I understand that by agreeing to participate in this research and signing this form I do not waive any of my legal rights. I understand that the research investigators named above will answer any of my questions about the research procedures, my rights as a participant, and research-related injuries at any time. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

If you have any questions or comments about the informed consent process or the St. Ambrose Institutional Research policy, please contact Dr. Tracy Schuster-Matlock, Dean of University Academic Programs, at (563) 333-6049.

APPENDIX D

GROUP INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP PROTOCOL

Stimulus:

A Place at the Table, produced by Teaching Tolerance and the Southern Poverty Law Center, is a 40-minute documentary featuring college student vignettes about their racial/ethnic heritage in the United States. The races represented in the film include Asian, Black, Native American, White/Non-Hispanic, and White/Hispanic from cultural backgrounds including Irish, Polish, Latino, African-American, and Japanese. The researcher chose this film to highlight the story of race in America from the perspective of both the majority and minority races in an attempt to place all participants within the conversation of diversity.

Procedure:

Students will view the 40-minute documentary as a stimulus to engaging in a dialogue on race. Following the film, the facilitator will conduct a semi-structured group interview. The facilitator will ask the students to form a circle with their chairs, with the facilitator joining the circle. Participants will be given a copy of the oral consent form and the facilitator will read the form aloud before beginning the interview portion and recording.

Note-taker:

A note-taker from outside of the research site with experience in focus group interviewing in a college student research setting will be present and sit outside of the group. The note-taker will compile her notes and submit to the researcher following the interviews. The researcher and note-taker will also conduct an in-person debriefing meeting to talk about overall, general impressions of the process and the dialogue.

Introductory Script (to be read after the informed consent information):

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on undergraduate student dialogues on race. To help set the stage for our conversation, I have brought along a film titled, *A Place at the Table*. This film features college students from diverse racial backgrounds talking about their family’s history in the United States as it relates to race. As you watch the film, please write down your reactions to their stories and impressions you have about their experiences related to race. This will help us with our conversation following the film. These notes are only for you; I will not collect these notes. After we watch the film, I have some questions to ask and will give you time to share your reactions. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

Interview protocol:

1. What is your reaction to the film?
2. Was there a particular story that struck you? What about it struck you?
 - a. What, if anything, surprised you?
3. In what ways, if any, do you relate to these students’ stories about race?
4. Is there anything else I should know about your reaction to the film?

Post-Interview Follow-up #1

Three days following the in-person interview, the researcher will E-mail individual participants and ask the following questions:

1. How did it feel to talk about this issue?
2. What feelings did it bring up for you?

3. What, if anything, made you uncomfortable?

Post-Interview Follow-up #2

One week following the interview (four days following the E-mail), the researcher will invite the participants to contribute to an online discussion board on Blackboard, the online course management system at the research site. A unique site will be set up for the purpose of the study and only those students who participated in the study will have access to the conversation on the following question: What have you thought about in regards to race or our discussion about race after our conversation?

APPENDIX E

EXEMPLARS

1. *The American Dream*

Jacqueline: Well, there's like there were so many immigrant cultures, and they're very different and they all have their own like thing, and then they come to America and they're like, all the same. I mean, there were still Germans, and French, and then they all learned that White is what you want to be because the darker people, you know, they're bad. And it's good to be White. So it stops being important, what your culture was. It's more important that you're White, because you're privileged. And then, cause if you're dark, you're not White, so then it's important that you're not White, and so then they have to connect to something; they can't be White. So they have to emphasize that sort of thing.

Gretchen: Yeah, if there's White, I think there's a bunch of different ethnicities, but if you were to ask someone they might say, Black, White, and Mexican. They might not say, 'well, there's German, and um, Czechoslovakian, and Welsh...' There's White and that's what you are.

Jacqueline: It's prized. It's considered the best.

Gretchen: Right. What does it matter what you are? You're White so, you're supreme.

Caroline: I would agree with that. I think people just lost a lot of their self-identity when they came to America simply because they were White and that's really, that was the most important thing.

Caroline: And I think a big part of it is how, at least how I experience this is, sometimes your parents keep going with the culture that they were raised with. So like both of my parents are German, mostly German, so I'm mostly German so um, there was one day where my friends and I were talking about different foods that we eat from our cultures, and I just made the comment that I don't think I necessarily eat anything special from, you know, Germany. They asked me what I eat and I was like, well I guess we eat a lot of meat and potatoes and they were like, that's what Germans eat! (laughter) and I was like, 'Well I guess I didn't know' (laughs). But you're not necessarily being told that this is what your heritage is, you're just eating meat and potatoes for dinner.

Jacqueline: That was like, White people were the first people to come here and then after a few generations they just saw themselves as the "true Americans." It's like, 'we're actually Americans' and any immigrant coming after that, that came from Ireland for example were different cause they weren't there for generations, they weren't real Americans, so to speak, so they were discriminated against. They don't have the same opportunities; they can't get as high because they weren't real Americans. Until eventually, darker people come in from like Russia, and people from WWII, like the Jews and people with different cultures and much darker skin, so the Irish, who were discriminated against before, they get to be White now, because they're not as bad as like the Japanese people coming. They're not as different. So they stop concentrating on the Irish people, because they're not as dark.

Taylor: Um, it made me feel um, lucky I guess. I'm a classic example of American melting pot. My great grandpa came from overseas, I have Native American, I look Italian but I'm not, I mean classic everything. My parents don't even tell me what I am because it's just such a variety. So the fact is that I have bits and pieces of everything that came into what I am, but probably because of my skin color for some reason is why I've been so well off. So unexposed to a lot of things.

Andy: Um, I think I, from the film, a lot of that information I had learned about in history class and it gave a good like, it encompassed a lot of similar issues all in one movie, so I think it was really interesting and it was a good example of all the discrimination that people had faced. The high school I went to was (HS Name) and it was predominantly White too, but we had a good mix of Africans and Mexicans as well. I didn't notice any harsh discrimination but there were divisions between people that were noticeable. I mean like, not like divisions that were noticeable or anything but like people would hang out with similar people and they were just like in their own groups in the school.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about that?

Andy: I mean like, not like divisions that were noticeable or anything but like people would hang out with similar people and they were just like in their own groups in the school.

Interviewer: So, how would you describe your interactions? Did you hang out with people different from you or did you stick to those that were like you?

Andy: I had interactions with some people who were different, but not a lot.

Caroline: "I thought they had all these false perceptions of what the American Dream was; I think they thought they were supposed to come over and everything was supposed to work out but then they realized that they were still going to have to work hard. And I think one of the biggest problems is that nothing was actually established here. So, maybe if they would have stayed in their home country they may have prospered more, because there was established civilization there. But here they had to come and actually create everything, so it created even more hardships."

Gretchen: I thought that they all wanted the same thing—to come over for the American Dream and none of them seemed to get it.

Gretchen: I think that Americans actually created the problem too because they made it look like a place where people could come and prosper. They wanted the immigrants to come over to help build things like the railroad and they didn't have enough people to do it and they wanted, they were working against like Communism and stuff so they wanted people to think America was better. All these people came because we were like, 'oh we're so great, you should come here,' and 'oh by the way, you're gonna have nothing, and you're gonna work hard and then we're going to kick you out because after the railroad is gone we don't want you anymore; now you're an annoyance...'

Kim: Ok, it came up in one of my classes, something about this kid was saying like, there's the Black History Month, why isn't there White history month? I

wish...I wished I had said this because I thought it and I should have said it, which is, there is White History, except we just call it History. Um, so I guess that, um kind of where I was going with that is that I wish I knew more about the history that affected people of different races and different nationalities and I guess kind of the one that stuck out to me was the girl who was talking about her Native American ancestors and I just, I mean obviously I knew that they were here first, that people pushed them out and left them with nothing. But I did not know details of like the schools that they were forced to go to, the details of what they were forced to do, what happened. They don't teach that. We call it History but it's White history.

Kenya: I think I probably liked Deloria (the Native American student in the film) because um, it just reminded me of my grandfather who escaped from a plantation because of how he looked. He was Native American, but he had these gray eyes, and he had this like really nice skin, really nice hair, so they wanted to keep him. But he was able to escape. And it was really amazing to see how like the culture has kind of like died through the generations of my family but they do let you know that no matter what you are Native American, you have history there. You don't do dances and stuff like that but it's there and you should be proud of it. Which I am.

Bethenny: I learned my heritage about my mother's side fairly quickly. She's Spanish and Italian and um, so I learned, I grew up that way. I grew up Hispanic. My dad wasn't around to teach the Black portion I guess, um, so it was pretty much up to my mom to take me to the library and learn my Black heritage that way. She loaded me up with books (laughter). As soon as I could read. Where we lived was predominantly White and so the way they taught diversity was like the big figures, so like MLK, and oh yeah there was Civil Rights and it was great and it was so tough for them. So my mom realized that and was like, 'You're going to go to a Black library in Chicago and you're gonna get a bunch of books.' And that's how I ended up knowing, technically, the history. I didn't start learning the code, just the certain stuff until I got here (at college), which was really weird because when I got here there was only five of us and I was only the second Black girl. The second one was a junior and her name was (Name) and I would see her from a distance and other than that, yeah, there were five of us. It was pretty lonely because my high school was really diverse. By the time I got to High School we had human relations where we had the Asian Club, the Black Club the Hispanic and the whole umbrella of just diversity and that was what we consider here MACA (the multicultural student club). So, we had a huge portion of just all these different cultures mixed. So when I got here, and five! (laughter) Five (laughter). For me it was just crazy because I was totally expecting more. And I remember the admissions counselor saying you know it's not like high school, it's a little more bland, so um, I was like, 'Oh, it's ok, I can handle it, I'm with White people all the time.' And then I get here I was like, 'Whoa. Five.' The whole year, five other people.

Jacqueline: "I don't know anything about my family history. Um, I know that they came from (Country in Eastern Europe). I don't know why or who or what different nationalities came from where or why or who I am. So I don't really know what to relate to. Except that I'm White, obviously."

Caroline: That's kind of the same boat I'm in, I guess I don't know a lot about my family history. I know I'm part Irish, Belgian, French, German, but that's almost the extent of it. I know how my grandparents lived, but that's just in America. I

don't know who came here originally, or anything, or their lives before coming here. And I think, that's one of the things in the film, in the very beginning, one of the guys was saying that people should know their history and where they come from because that's part of them. And I guess that makes a lot of sense, and I don't necessarily think I've ever taken the initiative to ask or study, or ask questions about my history.

Andy: Um, kind of I can relate to that. I actually am not entirely sure what my heritage is, but I know that one of my great great grandparents went to Ellis Island as well. I don't exactly know what he faced when he got here, but I should figure that out sometime.

Theresa: "I didn't realize how close my history actually was, if that makes sense. Cause like my grandmother came here from somewhere else. I know I'm (Western European) and that's all my mother has ever told me. I don't know when we came to America, it just seemed so far away. So yeah, I don't know anything about my heritage and it kinda made me jealous that they had a background and I don't."

Caroline: And I think a big part of it is how, at least how I experience this is, sometimes your parents keep going with the culture that they were raised with. So like both of my parents are German, mostly German, so I'm mostly German so um, there was one day where my friends and I were talking about different foods that we eat from our cultures, and I just made the comment that I don't think I necessarily eat anything special from, you know, Germany. They asked me what I eat and I was like, well I guess we eat a lot of meat and potatoes and they were like, that's what Germans eat! (laughter) and I was like, 'Well I guess I didn't know' (laughs). But you're not necessarily being told that this is what your heritage is, you're just eating meat and potatoes for dinner.

Jacqueline: I've like asked my mom about it, thinking she would know about it more, but all my grandparents are deceased, so I can't ask them how their parents got here, or what it was like, and I think my mom did do a background search to find out where the family tree starts and stuff, but that's really about it. Some people came from France. And my last name is Anderson, so I'm Norwegian, but that's really about it. And I think that they were French and they came to Canada and then here. And that's all I know.

Gretchen: Yeah, my grandparents came from Czechoslovakia, and that's pretty much all I know. I know she was very young. But like you said, all my grandparents are deceased, so I can't ask them how they were treated when they came to America. But I wonder what her struggles were when she came, because I know she didn't speak English.

Camille: It was right at the beginning when they were talking about how people don't really know their history, and these students knew the people, um, who were there ancestors. I think a lot of kids did like a family tree and things, so I know *where* my ancestors came from, but, I mean, I don't know anything about them. I don't know names, I've never seen pictures, and so that was something I kind of related to. I was like, 'Yep, that's me.'

Interviewer: Where is your family from?

Camille: All European. There's a lot of German, English, um, some Scotch-Irish, I guess, um, and then also Bohemia, so like what is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia. But I don't know which one. So...

Michael: I'm familiar with working with people looking for the American dream from their perspective, so...and how some of these people feel kind of like you know, it's difficult with their situation because they are not the same boat as like previous generations, like where coming here was not a choice, but um, so I think their attitudes are a little different, but their quality of life is much better here than in their part of the world. But I think especially the adults in this group are kind of ignorant to what the real opportunities are going to be for their children because like, um, their generation is going to struggle and they are not going to learn that much English. But their children are probably not going to benefit that much either because of education...it will probably be another generation before they see any benefits.

Michael: Maybe another thing that contributes to the feeling is that a lot of White people do have pretty recent ties to like Europe and immigration, but um, when like the first generation came over it was, you know, some of the experiences of intolerance and uh things like that, but because of their skin color it was easier to assimilate, so it became a thing where you know people could say, well I'm Irish and this is a bad thing, but eventually people will stop hearing my accent and it's beneficial for my family because we're a part of the power group with our skin color.

Kyle: This probably sounds cliché but it makes me feel proud of what I have, my family and like, going forward it makes me want to do that much better because of like, everything that happened and people still triumph through that, so it's like, I'm at (College) and I have all these great opportunities and I'm sitting here complaining about the tiniest things. So it's like, why complain; just keep going so...

Theresa: I can kind of agree with that. It made me uncomfortable because I didn't realize how close it was, if that makes sense. Like time period wise. Cause, like my grandmother came here from somewhere else. I know I'm German and that's all my mom has ever told me. I don't know when we came to America, it just seemed so far away. So yeah, I don't know anything about my heritage and it kinda made me jealous that they had a background and I don't. And yeah, it made me want to learn more about it now.

Interviewer: So, you are saying you don't know your family history?

Theresa: Right. Exactly. I know my dad said that we did own a plantation at one point, so I feel like the person they are complaining about is me. And it hurts.

Interviewer: And why do you think that is, that a lot of White students don't know where they came from?

Kim: I think for me, part of it is that my family honestly doesn't know. We maybe know the background but it's kinda twisted, or, that's not the right word, because my family's really huge, so going back that far and trying to keep everybody straight...like we have our family tree and dad's like talking to me about it and he was saying he needs to write down the more current one so I have it. But I think it's because once you get to a certain generation you don't know all the back-

stories. And my great grandparents on one side, like that was complicated enough. Like, the mom left so my grandfather ended up being raised by a cousin, and had stepchildren of their own, and then so it was like, it's complicated and they honestly don't know or don't remember. And my family loves telling stories so I think they honestly don't know. I'm pretty sure they would be.

Camille: And I think another reason is, I think, like in the stories they were talking, especially that girl who had Native American ancestors. They were oppressed, and so this could be wrong, I don't know, it's just the impression I got, but if your culture is oppressed and someone's trying to get rid of you, you're going to hang on to it, and you'll want to pass that on so that it stays alive. Um, and I think maybe it's, that...that we've taken our culture for granted and I guess we maybe don't think it's, I don't know...that important or that special because no one is trying to take it away from us and so we just I guess don't see the importance of clinging on to it. But then it ends up getting lost because you don't intentionally preserve it.

Interviewer: And where did you grow up?

Taylor: (City, State), in the middle of a lot of cornfields, so very sheltered (laughter). So...

Interviewer: So, not a lot of exposure to people different than you?

Taylor: No. I mean there were lots of Hispanics, but even in high school there were very few people with dark skin...one was adopted, so she may have been African American but she acted White, so you know, not exposed hardly at all except for Hispanics because of the area.

Interviewer: So, a lot of the White students that I've talked to have had the same reaction—that of not really knowing where they come from and sometimes feeling almost envious of the stories—that at least the students of color in the film know their story. Why do you think it is that many White people don't know their stories?

Theresa: I think maybe they are trying to hide it because it's not as triumphant, it's maybe the saddest part of the story, so they don't want to focus on it.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Theresa: Like, the oppression of it, and the fact that we did it. We're trying to ignore the fact. I don't think we would ever have a meeting where my dad would say, 'ok, this is what happened; this is what we did.' That would never happen.

Kim: I feel like for me, I don't know a whole lot just because there's so much. Like, I know some of it comes from Czechoslovakia, and some of it comes from Native Americans and from other different areas, so there's not even enough of one thing in me to pinpoint a specific region where I came from, which is kind of cool because I'm a classic example of American melting pot. I could be anything under the sun but at the same time I'm not enough of one thing to claim it.

2. *Racial Identity Development*

Kim: I'm ashamed to be White, honest to God. Like sometimes I wish I would wake up and be a different skin color so I wouldn't have to deal with what my race has done to people because it's not right at all and I mean, it's like I'm a White girl who grew up in the country, it was not that apparent. I didn't mean a Black or African-American person until, we had one African-American person in high school. That was it. Everybody else was White. I didn't even really know it existed until I got to college and on different service trips and stuff. And it's really weird because the way I was raised was, as long as you're working hard, you're judged more by what you're doing as a person, I mean I guess with my grandparents, well, with most people it's that way. And my family it's that way. They're not like racist really at all, um, except my extended family there is kind of an issue because well, they came from (State) and um, I guess my great grandma um, she like was one of the upper class in the south so like, they, she insists that they didn't have slaves, but just the way they talk I can see the racism there, and I love her to death and that really bothers me especially when I think that one of her daughters married an African American man which is awesome and I got to meet him it was great, but sometimes she has to sneak around the family because they don't really accept, fully accept. For me that was really accepting. They live in (State), so when they come back, I got to meet him and it was awesome, but just the fact that people are ashamed to meet him and can't admit it, it really annoyed me.

Interviewer: So, how do you handle that feeling?

Kim: I guess just try to show him that I, like I went right up to him and gave him a hug. I wanted him to know that we all struggle and that we should be helping each other. Why are we putting up barriers that shouldn't be there?

Interviewer: Can you guys talk more about what you've said about being ashamed to be White?

Camille: I guess it just makes me think about my decisions and that while I may not be able to fix everything that happens I can still make a good impression and do what I can and like, make a White person a respectable person that people, that minorities won't think, 'you're just another White jerk that's doing this to us.'

Kim: Sometimes being completely average, I feel like I'm at more of a disadvantage because there are so many opportunities because they are, or were at one point seen as bad or wrong, so they have more of an advantage at least with like scholarships and things like that. There are so many scholarships for people that, um, have some, something that's special about them. There's nothing for that average person that's complete melting pot. There's something for Irish or Native American or African-American, but there's nothing that I fell under, so sometimes it feels like I'm more at a disadvantage than they are.

Kyle: It almost seems like, talking and thinking about it now, it's almost like they are trying to like make up for what has been happening. Like, oh, because of that we're going to give you all this and we're not going to take any of it. And, I mean, cause we didn't live then, we're trying to do what we can now to combat that.

Theresa: And it's hard because I don't feel like I personally did anything wrong, but you can't just wipe the slate clean. Everyone would be on the same page.

Theresa: I guess when I talk to people of different races, I feel like they're being judgmental of me, like I should apologize to them. So I'm not hesitant talking to them because of how I feel about them, I'm hesitant to talk to them because of how I think they feel about me. I feel like I have to apologize to them. Just like I should say over and over again that we don't feel like that anymore. That I don't feel like that to them. I'm just always thinking, 'what do they think right now? Of what I'm answering, and is that going to change how they view me.

Theresa: Even though I'm White, I feel I am stereotyped just like other races. It may not have a profound effect on how I'm treated by other people like employees, etc., but it does affect how I live. The way I approach situations, censor my language, or treat others is different based on the way I believe they see me.

Taylor: The same story stuck out for me and like, how much I want to show them that not everyone feels that way anymore. I kind of had a similar situation...I don't remember this but apparently I was playing on the playground when I was little and this little Black girl wanted to come and play with me and I didn't want to. And my mom had no clue where it came from because you know I grew up in an area with nothing, no diversity at all. So she immediately went out and bought me a Black baby doll. And from then on I didn't see them, I don't see them as different. I mean, sometimes attitudes are different and you know you're not supposed to walk in the bad parts of town by yourself, but I just wish we could change all of that and make it on an even playing field I guess.

Gretchen: I feel like, and this might be a complete misconception, but I feel like in the Mexican/Latino heritage, or in the African-American heritage, your culture is stressed, and I feel like there is a lot of well, this is the struggle, this is how it was. I mean, my grandmother came from Czechoslovakia and I know she really liked it and that's about all that was said, and I wasn't really interested and then by the time I was interested, she was gone so, but, I think that in other cultures it's more stressed than in White culture.

Portia: My identity's just confusing. Mine's always been confusing. I am the two halves that make a half. So, I went through a lot of the racial slurs and stuff. And I couldn't, I wasn't good enough on this side and I wasn't good enough on this side. And I had to learn to get past all of the negativity. You know? And I had to learn it early. When I was really small, really little. I was really dark as a child. I got called nigger a lot and I would scream, 'I'm not Black!' and then they were like, 'Fine, spic!' And I would scream, 'I don't even know what that is!'

Portia: So my cousins, my younger brother and older brother they are White. They look White. My older brother has blue eyes and you know what I mean, and then there's me. And like growing up I was really dark. So I knew what, because you know I was half, so like my dad and my mom were both dark, like the dirty dark Mexican and that was you know, my color. I went through like, a lot of like the racial, the racial slurs and stuff. And I couldn't...I wasn't good enough on this side (gestures to one side with her hands) and I wasn't good enough on this side (gestures to the other side with her hands). I think I was like more open-minded because I've seen both sides.

Brandi: Coming here is harder than you think. Than for other people. I didn't talk to anyone for the first year, even last year really. But, I guess now I'm comfortable. I don't have any stress over it [race] anymore because I don't see myself as a race anymore. I know I'm Black and I'm a college student and that's just how I see myself. I just did that this year, so I could start going out and meeting people so I would remember college.

Bethenny: You see White people say, 'here's the stereotypes and I need you to conform to them.' And you see the rest of the people, the Black people saying, 'Ok, sure, I'll do that because that's the only way you will see who I am.' And then there's' like the two percent maybe who will say, 'Mmmm, no, that's not who I am, you can like it or leave it.'" And you get an issue because you're not being Black enough and you're trying to be White and it's like, 'No, I'm trying to succeed,' so it's complicated.

Brandi: So, I guess that like now I'm comfortable. I don't have any, like, stress over it, over race because I don't see myself as a race anymore. I know I'm Black and I'm a College student and that's how I see myself. But I don't see Black first and I don't see White first. If that makes sense. And I just did that this year, going out and meeting people so I would remember college. I didn't talk to anyone even last year really.

Bethenny: Well, like my sophomore year, yeah I'm pretty sure it was my sophomore year, every year it seems like there are more Black people and so like I started to um talk more and become friends with I guess Black people and I became very good friends with (name), (name), and a bunch of people that I would see on a regular basis and I would ask them about, like the weirdest questions that would have been like really normal, but I had no clue about. Like I had no clue what the hell a weave was (laughter) and I was like, 'woo!' That was not in the books! So I was very book smart, so I knew the history, I just didn't know the "history." I was very naïve when it came to the language and the lingo. The slang terms, I'm still learning and just...it's complicated (laughter). But you know I'm still learning because I just started learning this two, three years ago. Before that, it was strictly books or museums. My mom would take me to this, the (name) Museum in this (city) neighborhood. And that in itself was a trip because we got lost there and we were freaking out. But, (laughing) we finally found it. But yeah, museums and books, that's how I got my information until I got here at College. Which is ironic.

Bethenny: I was really glad that like, the longer I stood, the more Black women I saw. And I was like, I really need to get to know these women because you are the ones that are going to be teaching me to, react to this. Um, so, I don't know, I just, for me I find it very comforting to just know that all my roommates are White and I love 'em to death, I really do. But there are times when I need familiar. I just need to be familiar with other people and that's where (name) comes around and I'll be like, 'I just need you to sit here with me. I just need to talk.' And it helps. But it's just one of those things where, you realize how little you have at College, how small your circle is, um, and you're like, ok well I need to make sure I'm in contact with everyone, making sure everything is fine because if one falls well then it seems like everyone is going to fall and leave. Transfer, fails out. It's one of those things where we need to keep an eye on each other, you know, and keep each other strong and accountable for staying here and getting the degree because that's the reason why we're here.

Bethenny: And, I, I never took advantage when I was in high school. I always thought, well diversity is everywhere, but really like, I never saw it as a big thing. Most of my friends were, well all my friends were White. And I remember trying to go into a Black club or a Hispanic club. And the Hispanic club was fine, but the Black club, I wasn't Black enough. And, I didn't speak Ebonics, um, I had a hard time understanding them. And (laughter)

Bethenny: And they were like, 'you are an Oreo. You just can't be in our club.' And so (laughs) I was like, 'oh, ok.' So I went to Latinos Unidos and it was fine, that was that. Then when I came to College and saw that there was only like five people of Black descent and one of them was (Name) and she looked at me like, 'I don't want to talk to you...' I was like, 'Ok,' cause I already had the experience of like, they don't want me. So when I met (Name) and I met (Name) and other people I was so hesitant. I was like, 'Well they look inviting, but I'll just see...' So I had this whole thing. I was like, 'I'm here to get an education, that's the only reason I'm here. I don't need to make any Black friends.' Even though that's what I really needed. I needed someone who was like myself. Hispanic people have all these different browns and it's fine, I still needed, I still needed *me*. Um, the most Hispanics were, they looked very light complexion. And at least with my family. Some of them were Sicilian, so they still looked like me. But out of that there were Mexicans and all these different Hispanic cultures that are different hues, so when I came here, I was just like, well there aren't any other brown people other than these Black people and I really needed to connect with them. Because everyone else does not look like me and I *need* someone who looks like me, who can relate to me. I need that. Well, I'm sure that there's people now who still need that. And now there's this thing of, well yes I see you but do I really want to see you because I'm prejudice against my own race and I have stereotypes I need you to conform to...why are you not conforming? So it's a different challenge now. Yeah, we have a little bit more diversity, but at the same time it's not enough. And you may have a third of the population that's Black, but out of that third, you see the rest of College that's White....

Brandi: ...when I came here, I moved to (City) and there were no Black people. They thought I was a boy because I was the only Black girl. They automatically thought I was a boy. Once I got to know them—and they were White and Mexicans too—it was like, 'Oh I thought you were a boy when you came here.' But at first they had stereotypes of Black people and then they got to know me and there was still racist people that, I would be on the playground and there would be like KKK written on the slide or something and people would walk up to me. One boy walked up to me and was like, 'Why are you guys taking over (City) and I know you're all on welfare.' I was in sixth grade when that happened. Fifth or sixth grade. When he said that I was in fifth grade.

Interviewer: And how did you react to that?

Brandi: I remember feeling bad, but like I react differently than other people. I don't cry about stuff. Going from situation to situation it just builds you up and you're like 'it happens, whatever.' I know I'm not, so it doesn't matter. So, um, that happened. By the time middle school came or whatever it was fine. And then I moved to (City) and went to (High School Name) and me growing up in (City), then I get to (High School Name) and I wasn't Black enough. So, I didn't talk like them. Actually a White girl came up to me and told me she was "Blacker than me." (laughter). I was like, 'Ghetto and Black are two different things.' I actually

lived on (Street Name) and I didn't know that I lived on (Street Name) because I didn't act like it.

Interviewer: And how do people act that live on (Street Name)?

Brandi: Um, the stereotype of (Street Name) is like ghetto, they're always fighting, low socioeconomic status, and the way they dress was not how I dressed in high school. It was probably because I picked up on sports in high school. But, yeah, so I wasn't Black enough in high school and that probably pushed me forward. I think everything up to this point pushed me forward. Cause I wasn't White enough in (City), and not Black enough in (City).

3. *The Nature of Oppression*

Paul: ...Like, my mom went to a predominantly White school and it was like, she's told me it was like hell on earth for her, she was just discriminated and basically was kicked out of the school. And, like, coming from (City) and I went to school here, high school, and I would say it was a pretty diverse school and we weren't really faced with like, discrimination like that, I would say, um, but I definitely have experienced discrimination myself. But like, um, I understood a lot of the information that they were sharing.

Interviewer: You just mentioned that you have experienced discrimination. Would you feel comfortable sharing an experience here?

Paul: You know at the bookstore how they have the book buy-back thing. There is a police guy there and I entered into the bookstore and the policeman was at the table, towards the front. And there were a lot of people in there, I was aware of my surroundings; there was a lot of people. And I walked in and I walked to get a gift and I walked to an aisle and I was like, he was watching me. So, he like walked across to the other aisle to get a better view of me and I knew he was there looking at me because there were a lot of people there, but I was probably the only Black guy there and I knew I was being followed. And that was the bookstore here. Like I just knew it.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Paul: I mean, it does affect you, but like I said, like my parents said you're going to have to be prepared for it and brush it off. I don't know what else I could have done. I don't know if I could have approached him and like, I don't know if I have that in me to do that. And there's been other stuff like that.

Brandi: It's basically instilled in you by the time you get up to this point.

Kenya: Yeah, so um, my mom had just had my baby brother, he wasn't even a year old yet and we were going from (City, State) to (City, State) and my mom spoke to this landlord over the phone and he was like, 'yeah sure, you can move in, have your deposit and everything,' and then when we got there, he saw that you know, oh you're not White, like you sound over the phone, he was just kind of like, you know, 'you can't move in.' So, here's this single mother with four children, one a newborn, sitting on the curb like now what am I supposed to do? So we ended up homeless, living in our car until we were finally able to get into a shelter and then into another place to live, so we ended up missing school

Kenya: Oh yeah, it's something that, we dealt with on a regular basis, you know. We were called the "N" word in school you know, we didn't ever really have to deal with it for such a long time. I mean, it was like, 'oh that girl called me the N word today in school, but this is something you have to deal with for weeks and weeks until you could finally get situated and understand what went on.

Kenya: Oh yeah, I mean we'd get made fun of because of how we looked, because of our hair, you know my mom would braid our hair all the time so kids would say, 'oh you have worms coming out of your head, you have snakes coming out of your hair.' Kids were just really mean, so I mean, the stuff that they did was very minute compared to what we dealt with then.

Kenya: Oh yeah, oh yeah. My brother, he'll be twelve on Saturday like I said, and he's still getting called the "n" word. And it's just like, where do you learn that? From your parents. And if parents would teach their kids that certain things are not ok, you know, I think it would help a lot because I'll tell them, 'you know what, it's not ok that he called you that or that she called you that. Now you go, you tell the teacher to handle the situation.' It's when the situation is not handled, then something bigger needs to happen. A conference needs to happen. If you don't say anything, you're giving them license to continue the racism that should have died a long time ago.

Taylor: One thing that happened in high school was all the Hispanic girls made a huge clique. I don't even know half their names. But you naturally gravitate to people who are similar to you. But still, I don't know, I feel like they all hang out with themselves and we hang out with ourselves because we're similar to each other, but that's a reason why we don't get to know each other.

Michael: It sounds to me, like in the case of the second grader, if you know his father is Black and he's Black essentially, then you know he's probably growing up in a household that's racially aware, and um, you know so I think that may influence his ideas. But more generally I kind of wonder in these environments where there's not diversity and there's not a discussion of it either, that you know, just that um, children just kind of forced to make up their own perceptions of race. I think that a lot of really implicit messages from the media factor heavily into their ideas.

Theresa: I just was thinking about something I found out today. I observe in a second grade classroom and I thought this was interesting because it's so early in their life and I thought racism was, you know, on the way out. I heard about this today, there's one Black boy in the classroom, and there is one other student whose father is African-American and whose brother is, um, dark-skinned and he's African-American but he's completely White-skinned. He has all the features, but he considers himself White. And I guess the other day the Black boy was upset and this kid came up to him and said, "Oh you're angry like all Black men are." And that shocked me that he would say that at such a young age. It's so young and he already has stereotypes...

Jacqueline: And you talk about generalizations, and like a bad experience. Um, one of the things that's in that line. People tend to not think of people in the same group as not being the same, like...when people learn that I'm Jewish, they ask, 'Well, why do Jewish people do this,' And I'm like, 'I don't know.' If you're really that interested, why don't you study it? They think I'm like a representative

of everyone who's ever been Jewish in the world. They're like, 'this one Jewish person did this one thing; why did they do that?' And I'm like, 'I don't know. You should ask them' (laughter). And then they're like, arguing whether to call someone Black or African American, and the person says, 'Please call me African-American,' and they're like, 'But this other person said they prefer to be called Black.' And the person is like, 'Well yeah, we're two different people.' You go up to someone and you're like 'why do Black people do this? Why do Mexicans act this way?' I don't know. I'm not everyone, you know. We're individuals with different opinions and different feelings and we're not the exact thing. We're different people.

Caroline: One thing I would say, just about racism, or prejudice in general, is that people generalize. They'll have one bad encounter with this person whose say, Mexican or Puerto Rican or whatever, and they'll just write them all off. Cause like when I went home over Easter, my grandfather on my dad's side, I was talking and I had taken some of my friends home just to visit and one of the friends I took, he's Puerto Rican and my grandmother was like, 'Oh, you better watch, you know those Puerto Ricans...' and I was like, 'what are you talking about?' (laughter from all). And she was like, when she was in grade school they would write letters to kids in Puerto Rico, she grew up in (City, State) and I guess the boy that she was writing to one day like asked her to send him a pen or a pencil or something because they didn't have very good writing utensils and so she did and she was fine with that, and she said, but then he just kept asking for more and more stuff. And I was like, 'But my friend doesn't ask me for anything' (laughs). And so that was kind of a shock for me, for my grandmother to say that, after like seventy years ago. So, I mean, I didn't bring him with me to see her...it might have been interesting. And I did take him to my mom's side of the family. And like my grandparents loved him, like they thought he was a great kid and everything. But my mom actually told me that since he was a friend, my grandparents are fine with him, but she said if you would ever see him more than that, or date him, they wouldn't agree with, say, mixing races.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about that?

Caroline: Um, I didn't really like that, mostly because I feel like if there's a boy I meet of a different race I should be able to bring him home to my family and they should like him and they shouldn't judge him on what race he is but on the type of person he is. So, I think my family should know that I'm not just going to bring some random guy home...

Gretchen: That's kind of how I feel about my parents. They've never come out and said it but I think that there would be judgment passed. I don't know, my dad's kind of old school, like he would have a problem with it. And, I don't know, my mom would probably be fine. But at the same time it's like, I have felt like that for a while. It's just something about my parents; I feel like that's how they would be.

Brandi...and then it was like, I was never really a partier in high school, um I actually met a couple people, they were guys. I'm actually cool with guys, more than with girls. They were like, 'you should come to this party with us.' And we went over there, it was like a basement party and we went down and I was like, 'this isn't comfortable,' so I went back upstairs and this guy was like, 'what's the Black girl doing here?' I was like, 'What?' He saw the Black guys too, but he saw me. And so I feel like, here they accept Black guys before they accept Black girls. Um, and after that I never went to any parties again because it was uncomfortable.

And now it's like I settled into a place where it's like I want to talk to more people. Because I want to remember college. And it's like I'm a junior and found more friends. I found White friends who ask me questions not like, stupid questions, not ignorant questions, but questions that I want to answer. Questions that they really want to know because they haven't been around other races.

Brandi: Things still flare up here and there, but that happens.

Interviewer: I've heard you say, "it happens" a few times in our conversation. Do you feel like that's just the way it is?

Brandi: Yeah, some things I can let slide, but other stuff I'll speak up on. There was a situation where there was this White boy who was trying to break up a racial fight in (Residence Hall). And he was explaining it to us in Track practice and um, this other White guy who claimed he likes Black people and he's friends with the other guy who doesn't want people to know he's Black. And he's (the White boy) explaining it to us and was like, 'I didn't know what to do; they were both my friends,' and the older White guy was like, 'Well whose side did you take?' And this guy is a freshman. And I was like, 'now why would you tell him to pick sides. You're a junior and you're making him pick who his friends are, making him pick a side cause he's White.' And the thing is, he's Mexican too, he's not even full White and you can't conform him to what you think he should be. That is the one time, out of all the times that I actually snapped out because he's a freshman. He's like, he wasn't scared, but he was really shaken up by the situation and for him to be like, 'Well whose side did you take?' I was mad. And this guy was a White guy who says he likes Black people. I was just like, you have thoughts in the back of your head when it comes down to it. And you're gonna pick sides.

Portia: In my classes, I'm lucky if there's any other minorities, but I get a good education at College. I like my teachers, I like the students in my classes, I like you (looking at Caroline), but you have to be open minded and just willing to change and just get past all of the negativity.

Camille: I always wish I would say something or that I knew what to say because I also don't agree with that. Hearing them say that and then not saying anything back makes it like I agree with them and I don't. Um, definitely my parents were not as much. I think my parents got a little bit of that attitude but if it is present, it's not, I mean I don't think it's necessarily that they really think that, it's just the way they grew up. It's just, it stuck, you know.

Interviewer: So, how did they teach you about these attitudes?

Camille: I think, I'm not sure if it was intentional, there was never an attitude of this group is different and should be treated differently; there was never that attitude.

Theresa: I thought it was interesting how the one girl said that prejudice was built up in the home, and uh, um, I was thinking about my house and I know that twice with my younger siblings someone would come to the door who was African American trying to sell something and they would say, 'I'm sorry we don't buy things from Black people' and shut the door. And my mom freaked out because she has never said that to them before, she's never put a negative connotation on Black people, but they still reacted that way. And so that's something that I've

been trying to figure out. And we had the keynote speaker come and talk about the N word and that definitely intrigued me because he asked where does this negative connotation come from and a lot of people said well it must come from the home...

Interviewer: But you're thinking, well my mom never said that....

Theresa: And so, yeah, like she made them open the door and apologize.

Interviewer: And how old were they at the time?

Theresa: They were probably like five or six.

Interviewer: So, where do you think that came from? Did you all talk about it?

Theresa: I can't remember because I was only like four years older at the time, but it's something that has like stuck with me.

Taylor: The same story stuck out for me and like, how much I want to show them that not everyone feels that way anymore. I kind of had a similar situation... I don't remember this but apparently I was playing on the playground when I was little and this little Black girl wanted to come and play with me and I didn't want to. And my mom had no clue where it came from because you know I grew up in an area with nothing, no diversity at all. So she immediately went out and bought me a Black baby doll. And from then on I didn't see them, I don't see them as different. I mean, sometimes attitudes are different and you know you're not supposed to walk in the bad parts of town by yourself, but I just wish we could change all of that and make it on an even playing field I guess.

Theresa: I just was thinking about something I found out today. I observe in a second grade classroom and I thought this was interesting because it's so early in their life and I thought racism was, you know, on the way out. I heard about this today, there's one Black boy in the classroom, and there is one other student whose father is African-American and whose brother is, um, dark-skinned and he's African-American but he's completely White-skinned. He has all the features, but he considers himself White. And I guess the other day the Black boy was upset and this kid came up to him and said, "Oh you're angry like all Black men are." And that shocked me that he would say that at such a young age. It's so young and he already has stereotypes...

Interviewer: Where do you think those stereotypes come from?

Michael: It sounds to me, like in the case of the second grader, if you know his father is Black and he's Black essentially, then you know he's probably growing up in a household that's racially aware, and um, you know so I think that may influence his ideas. But more generally I kind of wonder in these environments where there's not diversity and there's not a discussion of it either, that you know, just that um, children just kind of forced to make up their own perceptions of race. I think that a lot of really implicit messages from the media factor heavily into their ideas.

Theresa: I think for me it was mainly literature. I was homeschooled and my mom was not a huge fan of the TV so a lot of my ideas came from what I read. And

history books still they use a lot of that material, White material, if that makes sense.

Taylor: The only thing I can think of where I would have gotten that is TV, like news, a lot of the issues or like robberies and stuff like that at least in (City) where people were stealing or shooting or whatever, you know I don't want to say that (City) had a gang or anything like that, but like, the three or four surrounding towns weren't big enough to have anything so they kind of congregated in (City) so I mean we did have that in the area, I just wasn't exposed to it. But what's different about being here, I'm also placed in that second grade classroom, some of the little boys were carrying around these pins of the boy that was shot in (City) at 2:00 in the morning or something like that and um, he's throwing up gang signs in the picture and that's who they look up to and I mean if that's who they look up to, if that's already in the schools in second grade and younger, like, that's gotta be where they're coming up with it. But they're growing up with it in their lives.

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