WHITE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES: EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCE CONTINUED PARTICIPATION IN RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE CAMPUS SETTINGS

By

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ABSTRACT

WHITE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES: EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCE CONTINUED PARTICIPATION IN RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE CAMPUS SETTINGS

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This study explored how the experiences of four white, undergraduate, self-identified social justice advocates influenced their on campus participation in racially and ethnically diverse settings. Acknowledging the existence and persistence of white privilege, ontological expansiveness, and epistemological ignorance, the research was grounded in critical white studies and influenced by the tenets of critical race theory. Their experiences as sustained participants in racially and ethnically diverse settings such as the Black Student Alliance, the Multicultural Hall, and other campus based gathering locations of racial/ethnic minority students at a small liberal arts college were collected through in depth interviews. The data were analyzed using portraiture and constant comparative methods. Key findings included the impact of social tourism; the difference between advertised and experienced institutional climate, culture and liberalism; the role of multicultural residence halls; and the importance of developing diverse networks.

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I am indebted to Margaret, Ronaldinho, Felix, and Shilo for your willingness to participate in this study and I thank each of you for taking the time to share a piece of yourself. Your stories and experiences are insightful and taught me so much as I progressed through the dissertation process and grapple with the meaning of my own whiteness. I encourage each of you to remain cognizant of race and continue to raise questions as you move through the world.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues who have talked me off of writing ledges, provided insights, directions, thought provoking conversations, and lots of laughter when I needed it most. You all may never know how much you helped (re)energize me when I was alone on my academic island. I also owe many thanks to coffee shops all over the country for providing a familiar environment for me to sit with my study while we hashed things out.

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PROLOGUE

"Who am I?" is a very general question that we may have all asked others and ourselves at some point throughout our lives. I am Jesse S. Watson, a graduate student in the Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education Program at Michigan State University. I am a California native and desperately miss the West Coast. I come from lower middle class roots originating from Southern California with a majority of my formative years spent in the San Fernando Valley. I am a first generation college student in all respects, from my associate's degree, which I fashioned from classes at several community colleges along the way to my master's and in the current pursuit of a doctorate. I have come to see race as a central part of all interactions within the context of the United States and I feel that my life's experiences have had a profound impact on that perspective.

In this dissertation, I study white students who participated in racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms), which I believe is important to investigate because of the historic existence of whiteness as a foundation for our country, systemically and culturally. One of my intentions is to discern how the experiences of white students can be translated into (re)shaping the campus environment and culture at PWIs, and possibly on a grander scale, (re)shaping our society to be more inclusive and less reliant on a white norm or baseline. Beneath that though, there is something within me that brought me to this juncture, to this project; it is the accumulation and reflection of my life's experiences. This project/line of inquiry has been churning within me for many years now without being named or having an outlet. Finally, I have the opportunity to explore it further both for myself, and more importantly, the possibility of being a catalyst of change for the greater good.

The study is laid out in detail in the coming chapters, but, at this point, it is important to share some of the salient experiences that helped shape who I am today as a person and researcher, and that led to the focus of this dissertation research. In this way, I situate myself in the research process, the continually evolving context of my life, and the current study. This chapter provides my interpretation of events in which I was exposed to racially centered and targeted situations that I acknowledged, and in some cases only later, upon reflection, was able to identify as such. During my recollection and reflection process, I used poems and journal entries that I wrote throughout the course of my life to refresh my memory and reflect the position(s) that I was in at the time, which helped shape the person and researcher that I am today. I infused a poem into this introduction of myself to share how long I have contemplated and toiled with issues of race and the affect they had on my environment at the time.

Throughout the multiple iterations of this dissertation, I find that as I collect and research the experiences of these individuals, I re-visit and re-search my own experiences. The iterative process allows me to make sense of what I have encountered through my life as I engage these individuals in recounting their own experiences. I am left to ponder what it is that we, as a collective group, can do to bring about change in our lives, on our campuses and in our society.

Back Drop: California

Being born in the mid-70s and living and growing up in multiple areas of Southern California profoundly affected my view of the world and made race and race-related issues salient for me. Growing up in an area of the San Fernando Valley that over the course of my life shifted from being predominantly white to Latino while remaining primarily working-class afforded me many opportunities to interact on a daily basis with people from other racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Reflecting back, I recall being the only white boy amongst the

neighborhood children. Having friends named Esmeralda, Pepe, Maria and Juan was a normal and natural thing for me. It was not until my late teenage years that I found that this was a phenomenon that was not experienced by my cousins in Oregon, Illinois and a majority of the country.

During junior high school and my teenage years, my experiences as a white male in a predominantly Latino school environment became trying, leaving me with more questions than answers and the realization that I was racially different from my peers. I was often harassed by a select few of my Latino male peers and recall very vividly sitting in metal shop, being slapped in the back of my head and neck, and called a "Red Neck" or "white boy." At the time, I did not understand why these individuals with whom I had little or no interaction prior to these particular classes were singling me out. It hurt and angered me because I did not have any recourse without experiencing serious physical repercussions. To this day, I can still see their angry faces and the disrespect that they held for me simply because I was a “white boy.” It was confusing for me to think about, and I was left unable to associate their anger with anything more than my being a smaller boy with a physical appearance not like theirs.

Although I do not support singling out individuals based on the difference of their race or ethnicity, in retrospect, it provided me the opportunity to experience first hand dislike, malice and even hate because of my skin color. It provided me a brief, albeit miniscule comparison to what racial and ethnic minorities experienced on a daily basis. Going over the memories again, I recall the anxiety and tension that built up as I went to metal shop, and how I hoped that ‘Caesar’ was not in class so that I would not have to be slapped or berated. I can also now reflect on that semester with a more sensitive lens and think about possible influences for Caesar, such as familial frustrations at home, that our metal shop classroom provided an outlet for. Regardless

of his motivations to lash out at me in class, like many other people that I have encountered in my life, Caesar unwittingly played the role of teacher by exposing me to one of the many facets of living as a racial minority within and against a majority context.

I must temper my experiences as a social and racial minority with my status as a white male living in an environment saturated with images of whiteness as the norm. Daily images and normative reinforcement during my 'formative' years included my daily household environment, media programming, and images and interactions with white majority authority figures. These circumstances allowed me to experience life in different shades and sides of the color line that exists in our society. I was afforded an opportunity to be both here and there (Geertz, 1973) on a daily basis, with as much ease as opening and closing the screen door at my childhood home.

Growing up Exposed to Multiple Cultures

I had the opportunity to befriend people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (many of whom, I am still friends with to this day) and to grow up in their households as well as in my own. From an early age, I was exposed to my friends' varying "flavors" of home life, which consisted of everyday things such as meals, intra-family exchanges as well as annual events such as holiday traditions, birthday celebrations, etc. The diverse range of daily and annual cultural rituals that I was able to engage in demonstrated for me the multitude of familial experiences that were possible, and I began to realize that white was neither the only possibility nor norm. I was able, firsthand, to compare and contrast similarities and differences between my family and the households of my friends ranging from Filipino Americans to Mexican Americans to Puerto Rican Americans to Italian Americans to German Americans to El Salvadorian Americans.

One of the earliest experiences I can recall was exposure to different ceremonies and traditions relating to Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Growing up in a Roman Catholic household, we celebrated on Christmas morning with opening all of our presents followed by an early dinner featuring a ham or a standing rib roast. Our Christmas festivities were generally shared with immediate family (mom, step-dad, sister and grandma), some years including my Aunt and Uncle, and possibly my father stopping by to drop off some last minute gifts. When I experienced Christmas at my El Salvadorian friend's home, the exchange of gifts occurred promptly at midnight, preceded by an extensive dinner featuring various types of tamales; with my Filipino 'family' we opened presents after the stroke of midnight and the vast dinner served prior to that included lumpia and pancit along with deserts such as putos reserved for special occasions. Both families also sang Christmas Carols with a large number of children and family members gathered together.

I am grateful to my 'adoptive families' because they accepted me into their fold and exposed me to alternate ways of experiencing and celebrating occasions like Christmas, birthdays, weddings, quinceaneras, etc. I came away with a greater appreciation not only for their cultural ceremonies and traditions, but also for the differences and similarities with those of my own family. I also experienced a greater sense of family through the coming together of family members on a consistent basis throughout the year, versus getting together for one or two 'major holidays' as was my family's custom. Reflecting on these experiences, I really was introduced into cultural settings and ceremonies that ran counter to the white majority portrayed in the media and discussed in school.

Building upon the Experiential Foundation of Difference

During my childhood and pre teens, I began to realize the racial difference in other areas of the country when my family made several trips to Southern Illinois to visit my stepfather's family. There, the environment I experienced was completely white, void of any racial diversity, something one rarely saw except maybe on a 1950's television sitcom. My father took my sister and me to Southern Oregon for an annual family reunion and when we went into town, there was little to no racial diversity. Family gatherings in Oregon and Illinois involved a lot of play, joking and laughter, oftentimes at the expense of racial minorities. These interactions contained slanderous and derogatory overtones, and I recall when it really occurred to me that this type of behavior was unacceptable, as these family members were saying things about people who were racially identical to many of my friends and love interests. I talked with my mother about the language being used, and we concluded that these relatives did not have the same experiences and upbringing that my sister and I did; at that point I realized that I had to choose my 'battles' wisely if I were to confront family members about racial remarks.

Driving across country and spending time in these areas demonstrated to me how 'white' the country was as a whole, and I had the opportunity to view the world through a different lens by comparing the realities as I experienced them, that of my hometown with that of my family members in various portions of the country. Over time and through experiences like these, I began to realize that the rest of the country was not like Southern California, and I valued these trips for the exposure to the difference that existed.

The Effects of Racial Tension and Revolt

As a sixteen year old, experiencing the 1992 Los Angeles Riots was the first situation in which I was cognizant and able to deal with issues of race and racism. Both the local and national media documented the events leading up to the riot extensively. Four white male Los

Angeles Police Officers were caught on tape savagely beating a Black male motorist whom they chased after a drawn out traffic stop. The taped portion of the beating lasted for eighty-one seconds and sparked outrage across the country and in particular, minority communities in the Los Angeles area. The four police officers were put on trial and later acquitted of any wrong doing, which led to an outcry from minority and politically active groups in Southern California and across the country. With no other viable options, a mass of people took to the streets in protest, which later erupted into riots leaving in their wake 13 people dead and another 192 injured (Staten, 1992).

I wrote the following poem entitled, “Our City” on April 30, 1992 in reaction to my thoughts and feelings about images, writings, and resulting coverage of the ongoing riot. I broke the poem at various points in order to emphasize portions as well as to reflect on where I was as a young white male trying to make sense of the ongoing violence, what it meant to be a racial being, and the violent racism that sparked the riot/reaction.

Racism and
violence
plague the
city
for all of these
people
I have
pity
they can’t
see beyond
the color

As I reread this poem, I find that although I honestly intended to be a concerned observer and as active a participant as possible, I was misguided. I operated from a foundation of color-blindness versus active acceptance of diversity and culture, and my color-blind attitude seeped into this poem. Although I was unaware of the concept and roots of color-blindness, a tool used by white

individuals to side step racial issues and inequities (Alexander, 2012; Strauss, 1986), my intention was to love and embrace all people. As a white male, I was acculturated to exist from a white-as-norm perspective, which ultimately left all "others" with a deficit.

in this world
we're all
sister and brother
it can't be
stopped
not now
not ever
racism will
plague our
world
forever
like a disease

While I was not armed with the requisite language to properly identify my positionality and perspective, I pointed to the systemic nature of racism in our country as it welled up to the surface in Los Angeles during the 1992 riots. In the poem, I am referring to equity and equality as goals for which we, as a society, need to strive. I was coming to the realization that equity and equality may never be truly attained because of the inherent systemic race and racism in our national context. Even with this chilling realization, I believed that it was still something worth striving for.

they'll never
listen to
my pleas
or anyone's
for that
matter
the crowd just
lingers
and will never
scatter
we're hanging
ourselves
destroying

it all
if we stay
like this
divided
we will fall

The riots only lasted five days, but it felt like an eternity because of the massive media coverage and the extensive damage caused primarily to minority neighborhoods in the downtown urban areas. The effects of the verdict and the subsequent riot reverberated into the suburbs and places like my high school. It was confusing and horrifying to watch the daily chaos and violence that devastated the predominantly minority areas of Los Angeles. The mass movement of rioters, along with the increased intensity of violence perpetrated on seemingly innocent individuals who were in the wrong place at the wrong time, psychologically wore on me.

I can't stand it
it pisses me off
these stupid
deeds
they will not
stop

I recall the anger and frustration I felt for all parties involved. Both the blatantly and intolerably racist actions of the four white male police officers and the rage and frustration-fueled response of the rioters caused me angst and tore at the fabric of my normative constructed reality. I did not understand why violence was a tolerable response to violence; here my naivety showed through. My frustration and words are based on misunderstanding and naïve faith in the status quo that is inherently lopsided. As I reflect back now, I try to think about life through the lens of ethnic or racial minorities who live in a daily environment in which they are viewed and treated as other, the frustrations that build up could leave no other recourse but to riot. I can see the riot as the

ultimate physical expression of mass frustration and rage for a blatant act of injustice perpetrated against minority citizens by majority, white citizens.

I am saddened by
this
and all the
racist hate
if this our
societies
fate
then the end
of the world
is a welcomed
date.

The root of this eruption of civil unrest was the racism that was invisible to the majority white culture yet easily discerned by those directly disadvantaged. Built into our city, state and country is an embedded system of racism, like so many aspects of control and power; it has gone 'underground' or faded into the background. The once overt signage and segregation laws of our not so distant past have become covert. Like the tip of an iceberg, the brutality of these police officers pointed at the colossal and jagged crystallized mass of racism that existed just below our society's surface.

Seeing and Being Amongst Cultures Domestically and Internationally

From my current position at first glance looking back, my life experiences focused on racial diversity appear to not be connected. Upon closer inspection they connect through a winding path where the prevalence of race played out in multiple situations and in multiple contexts, domestic and international. Serving in the United States Navy from January 1995 through December 1998, I lived in many places across the United States and was ultimately stationed in Agana, Guam for a majority of that time. From Guam, my ship the USS FRANK CABLE (AS 40) was deployed to Sydney, Australia; Pusan, South Korea; Hong Kong, China

(still under the control of the British at that time) and numerous times to Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan. Naming these ports of call allows you to envision the multiple contexts (whether you are familiar with them or not) in which I was tasked to exist in, oftentimes as the unmistakable racial and ethnic minority.

My travels to these areas, especially South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, afforded me the opportunity to exist as an "other", which was very uncomfortable and challenging at times. I recall one time in Sasebo, Japan, a shipmate and I traveled around town taking in the sights and then stopped at a restaurant for dinner. Entering the restaurant, crowded with what appeared to be locals, we were met at the door, told that they were not open and that we could not be served. There clearly were no Americans in the restaurant and we were refused service because of who we were and what we represented to these Japanese citizens.

This experience in Japan was the first time I truly felt like an outsider in a foreign context and had to face that there was difference and bias held towards me because of who I was as a white American male service member. The sense of ‘other’ for me was forever changed and brought to the forefront. I still vividly see myself on the train to the Narita International Airport, white male with bright blond hair, sitting amongst a train full of Japanese citizens heading home from work. No one within sight looked anything like me. It then hit me that this is what it might feel like for racial minorities in the United States who lived in predominantly white areas like Southern Illinois. I was as close as I had ever come to being a racial and national minority during this brief period of my life.

An interesting artifact that I experienced while being immersed in the foreign context of these countries was that whenever we came across any Americans, there was a sense of relief and joy expressed by both parties. It did not matter if we knew the others or not, what they

looked like, ethnicity, racial background, and geographic origin in the United States; simply by being together as Americans, we could say hello and share in some common experience.

Today, Tomorrow and the Future; The Evolution Continues

After being away in the U.S. Navy and experiencing multiple cultures on and off the ship, I returned home to begin community college. Driving one evening with a friend (another white male), we were pulled over by the police for speeding and not having a front license plate. My friend and I both had shaved heads and goatees, which I think affected the outcome of this traffic stop. After running my friend's information, the white male Sherriff returned to the car and told us to get the plate taken care of and to watch our speed. The part that caught me off guard was when he was leaving he leaned down into our window, and with his left hand, tapped the door and told us to, "Have a good night, brothers." People have told me the same thing in other contexts, none of which had the same effect as it did that night. It was how the Sherriff said it that struck me at the time and still to this day. To me, he implied a racial bond between white males. I often think back to that moment and wonder how a car with two Latino or Black males would have experienced that traffic stop. I am sure that they would not have been let off with just a warning and then called brothers by that white Sherriff.

Experiences such as these built the foundation for my interest in issues of race, diversity and equity. I find that as a white, male, lower middle-class, first generation graduate student who has come to recognize the prevalence of white privilege across PWIs and society writ large, issues of diversity, equality and most importantly, equity are vital to the development of our students, citizens and society.

"Conclusion"

Given the topic of my research and its importance to me, I believe that I, as a person and researcher, need to be exposed for the sake of transparency and integrity of the study. I feel it is important to see the person that I am, the individual forged from multiple experiences, and how those experiences affected the research process and me. It would be remiss not to acknowledge the influence and exposure of those minority (racial, ethnic, gender, and otherwise) authority figures and mentors with whom I have had the pleasure of studying and working. Reflection showed and reaffirmed for me that as a researcher; I am contextually bound, bringing into this process all of my encounters and experiences, unable (and possibly unwilling) to shut off core pieces of me as if flipping a switch.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination - and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past - are real and must be addressed" (Obama, 2008, p.8). I want to expand upon the point the President made about the need for greater racial awareness on the part of whites by including all racial/ethnic minority groups. The acknowledgement called for by the President must take us, the white community, past Jim Crow legislation and the current calls for Colorblindness to honest appraisal and acknowledgement of how whites and this country have been wrong about issues of race and oppression of racial/ethnic minority groups. The point that President Obama raises about the country is no different at the campus community level, as Cole (2007) noted, "for many White students at [predominantly white institutions] PWIs, interracial interactions could be avoided" (p. 274). As Gallagher (2003) posited, whites demonstrate racial dominance when they as "whites do not have to think about being white because white privilege and white standards are so culturally embedded that whiteness has been 'naturalized'" (p. 301). President Obama, Cole, and Gallagher spoke to the need for exploring white student experiences and how those experiences affect the campus community.

I am interested in the experiences of white students at PWIs who negotiated multiple obstacles while being members of racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups. The bulk of existing higher education literature in the area of race, social justice, and equity focuses on minority students. This body of literature illuminates and examines the contexts in which racial/ethnic minority students exist. The literature however, does not adequately examine how

white students fit into the grander scheme of diversity and what their experiences with diversity are on college campuses. In this chapter, I identify the purpose of the study and the overarching research question, the importance of this study, and provide an overview of the literature review and methods section.

The goal of this exploratory study was to investigate and appreciate the experiences of white undergraduate college students who (as racial beings) participated to varied degrees as members of r/e ms groups at a PWI. This study helped to bridge the "gap in higher education's knowledge base relating to the limited exploration of White racial identity" (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000, p. 81) by looking at what white students go through during interracial interactions using their own words. This study explored one facet of how the collegiate experience connected theoretical viewpoints such as white privilege and tenants of Critical Race Theory, and Critical White Studies in the real life, day-to-day experiences of these white students at one PWI. The following research question guided this exploratory study:

How do the experiences of white Social Justice Advocates influence their on campus participation in racially and ethnically diverse campus settings?

Along with the summary of my personal experiences highlighted in the prologue, the impetus for this study emerged from my readings about the founding of the United States. Our country was established by immigrants and fundamentally based upon subjugation and oppression; so it was not surprising to find that issues of race intertwined with the creation of our nation (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Haney Lopez, 1996). The existence of otherness in our country has been interwoven into the fabric of our mainstream dialogue for over 200 years and continues to resurface in forms ranging from the marches and protests of the 1960s to the rise of racially based studies programs like Chicano studies to the Million Man March to the

credentials of President Obama during the 2008 presidential election to the repeated attacks on ethnic studies programs in the State of Arizona. Ongoing political events and presence of an African American President have provided the often-neglected opportunity for our country to engage in meaningful racial discussions, the likes of which have not been seen since the 1960s involving Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I hope that one facet of this study can be used to combat the reluctance for an honest and open dialogue about race and inherent privileges of whites at PWIs.

Thelin (2004) depicted the birth of higher education in the United States of America, describing the interconnectedness of whiteness and higher education in the colonies. The earliest college students were sons of privilege who were expected to become leaders in the new world (Lefkowitz Horrowitz, 1987; Thelin, 2004). Nkomo (2000) noted that "white males have dominated the production of knowledge, [making] their values and concerns" (p. 419) a governing force. The dominance of knowledge production by white males has allowed values and expectations, which are self-serving or white serving at their core, to become the norm against which all other values are compared. A PWI served as the contextual backdrop of my study. I chose to focus on PWIs because this kind of institution dominates the higher education landscape and serves as a reflection of our society, which is still dominated by white males.

antonio (2004) called for research "to probe deeper into the friendship groups of white students and understand the differences in interaction within racially diverse groups compared to more homogenous ones" (p. 466). With this study's exploration of white student experiences negotiating participation in r/e ms groups, I have begun a search that expands upon the area of need antonio identified. I, like Roediger (1994) and others, want to ensure that whiteness continues to be seen as a racial category, something of societal substance requiring constant

interrogation. Too often in most facets of our personal and professional lives discussions around whiteness are dismissed as passé and topics that are overdone but it is this exact gesture where the insidious nature of whiteness exists. When referring to whiteness as a racial category, Roediger (1994) writes that:

> Whites are assumed not to 'have race,' though they might be racists. Many of the most critical advances of recent scholarship on the social construction of race have come precisely because writers have challenged the assumption that we only need to explain why people come to be considered Black, Asian, Native American or Hispanic. (p. 12)

Neglecting to address the invention and continued maintenance of the white race becomes problematic when it is considered that minority student enrollments over the next two decades are going to increase from 19% to 40% (Cole, 2007).

This exploratory study ventured into an intersection between issues of race, power, space, and college student participation. Such an intersection may or may not lead to discovery but is worth the continued effort to search for connections and report the experiences of these white students. Similar intersections were presented by Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) who extensively listed authors who advanced the research regarding multicultural education as well as antonio (2001) who noted a considerable amount of literature on minority student groups. There is an implicit assumption in the literature that the whiteness of campuses acts as a backdrop against which diversity outreach occurs and r/e ms must exist. That being said, research studies such as mine that focus on illuminating the experiences of white students as they negotiate space that is inherently not familiar has not kept pace. The lack of focused research omits an important piece of the holistic campus picture and does a disservice to our constantly changing campus communities. The caveat to this perspective on the body of research is that the majority of all foundational college student studies were predominantly based on the experiences of white males. As studies have developed and focused on the experiences of r/e ms at PWIs, the

investigation of whiteness has been lacking and is sorely needed to compliment the equity and diversity efforts of other scholars.

The separation of students into two groups, white and racial/ethnic minority creates a false binary that is required for the purposes of this study but warrants that I acknowledge the convenient and oppressive nature this can evoke. I was hesitant to employ a false binary but it could not be avoided because of the elusive nature of the target group of white students and their affiliations. However, acknowledging and discussing seemingly minute details such as a false binary serve to bring such occurrences of power in its multiple forms to the forefront.

There have been research gains made in diversity, equity, power, and privilege but further exploration and interrogation needs to be carried out. Multiple authors continue to call for persistent conversation to maintain a spotlight on issues of race and power so that complacency is not reached (Allen, 2004; Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Chang, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Flagg, 1993; Guifridda, 2003; Haney Lopez, 1996; Helms, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Kendall, 2006; Kim, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McIntosh, 2003; Mercer & Cunningham, 2003; Milner IV, 2007; Mitchell & Dell, 1992; Miville, Darlington, Whitlock, & Mulligan, 2005; Obama, 2008; Peters, 2004; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Reason, Roosa Miller, & Scales, 2005; Renner, 2003; Reynolds & Pope, 2005; Torres, 2005). Ramirez (2000) asserted “the reluctance of the academy to engage issues of differences and inequality has been strongly reinforced by a society that has great difficulty talking openly about race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or conditions of disability” (p. 407). By relentlessly raising issues of race and associated injustices, I strive to maintain my contribution to the conversation within the higher education community.

Particularly, I look to engage with my white colleagues about issues of power, privilege, and reward that exist in the academy because of the systemic and inherent nature of whiteness.

The following chapters move through examination of the current body of applicable literature through the chosen framework and methodology, to the portraits of the participants ending with my discussion and implications. Chapter two is an overview of pertinent literature related to my study including research on white privilege (Allan, 2003; Jensen, 2003; McIntosh, 2003; Turner & Myers, 2000), critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney Lopez, 1996), critical white studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997), white identity (Helms, 1992; Leach, Behrens, & LaFleur, 2002), racial dynamics and campus culture (Chang, 2002; Chavez, Guido-DrBrito, & Mallory, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Umbach & Kuh, 2006) and student involvement in groups (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993; Chang, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Chapter three details the methodology for this qualitative study including my perspective on research and knowledge, and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) as the method that was employed along with the rationale for its use. I chose portraiture as my method, which textually depicts the shared experiences of the four participants through a recorded stylistic representation much like paint with a picture.

Chapters four through eight are the portraits of the participants Margaret, Ronaldinho, Felix, Shilo, and of Sunshine Valley College, the site of this study. The textual portraits are the result of a fusion of several types of data and perceptions of the participants and me as researcher. Chapter nine is where I discuss the portraits and present some additional data that supports the portraits of the participants. Chapter 10 is where I appraise the lessons learned from the shared experiences and stories as well as proposed next steps. Finally, I will provide an

epilogue in which I, as researcher, conclude this experience with my personal reflections and thoughts about the process as I made my way through this project as a white male dealing with and confronting issues of race, power, and privilege.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this exploratory study was to discuss the motivating factors and appreciate the experiences of white undergraduate college students who were members of racial/ethnic minority student groups at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). In this chapter, I review literature on white privilege, Critical Race Theory, Critical White Studies, College Student Involvement, campus racial dynamics, and White Racial Identity Development. The subsequent literature review informed my thinking and served as my point of departure for this study.

White Privilege

Since studying the experiences of white students, I believe it is imperative to acknowledge and openly discuss the existence of white privilege. First, I highlight two literature reviews involving white privilege and its prevalence in higher education (Manglitz, 2003) and business management (Grimes, 2002). These reviews provide perspectives that add to the growing conversation focused on whiteness and white privilege as well as direct attention to the existing silence surrounding whiteness in the literature.

Manglitz (2003) provided an overview of the white privilege literature concentrating on recommendations for expansion of the literature base primarily in the social sciences. Grimes (2002) chose not to include "practitioner-oriented books dealing with diversity and diversity management articles in the academic literature" (p. 387). The use of magazine and journal articles from non-academic and peer-reviewed sources without empirical data limits the credibility of the review. Neither Manglitz nor Grimes adequately addressed the affect that white privilege has on college campus diversity and interracial interactions. There is a growing portion

of empirical literature, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, which establishes a foundation for future research.

The existence of white privilege is duly noted in the literature with many working definitions used by different authors but no agreed upon singular meaning (Akintunde, 1999; Allan, 2003; Blackshire-Belay 1998; Brown II, 2000; Clegg, 1999; Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Manglitz, 2003; Osborne & Young, 2006; Quezada & Louque, 2004; Reynolds & Pope, 2005; Rodriquez, 1999; Sanders, 1999; Turner & Myers, 2000). McIntosh (2003) provides one of the most commonly cited definitions, referring to white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which [white individuals] can count on cashing in each day" (p. 148). Jensen (2003) succinctly described the "ultimate white privilege: the privilege to acknowledge you have unearned privilege but ignore what it means" (p. 79). White privilege provides white individuals with the option to acknowledge the daily, inherent benefits that we receive.

White privilege is a system of power, control, and advantage woven into the very fabric of our society's everyday operations. Allan (2003) describes privilege as "not a choice but rather a condition emerging from the unearned advantages that accompany particular identity categories in a given sociopolitical context" (p. 3). The systemic nature of privilege that Allan speaks of is affirmed by Turner and Myers (2000) who state that "privilege exists for those who need not concern themselves with the painful sense of 'otherness' on a daily basis, and can remain blissfully ignorant of what that experience is" (p. 228). Lensmire (2011) adds that whites "benefiting from a society that at every moment disregards a founding principle – that all people are created equal. Stated differently, racial stereotypes enable white people to continue believing in democracy even as they betray it" (p. 102). As members of the majority culture, whites

possess an inherent ability to engage those ‘others’ on white terms and conditions. Majority members have the distinct ability to disengage with minority members and situations, and fade back into the whiteness of the dominant culture that is prevalent at PWIs.

For the purposes of this study, I fused the definitions of Allan (2003), Jensen (2003), Lensmire (2011), McIntosh (2003), and Turner and Myers (2000) to define white privilege as the set of unearned advantages that are coupled with the choice to acknowledge and/or ignore those advantages. I believe white privilege is a foundational piece of the daily experiences of all citizens in the United States with different influences based upon our skin color.

The majority of the literature on white privilege is anecdotal, written from the perspective of white authors as reflective and self-exploratory pieces. Those pieces that are empirical are limited by two general factors: focus (topic) and scope (breadth). The narrow focus of qualitative empirical studies limits how they can be generalized throughout the academy. There is also a lack of depth from empirically grounded qualitative studies that allows for the voices of white students in multicultural interactions to be heard. Conversely, quantitative empirical studies attempts to utilize surveys to investigate multiple campuses, which provides some generalizable findings but lacks the personal voices of students.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) began to challenge my perspectives on race-based research and became a foundation from which to launch this line of inquiry. CRT provides a focus for me to start this expository process because it places race squarely in the center of the conversation. As I continually question, develop, and invigorate my way of thinking about issues of power and privilege; I too place race at the center of all conversations. Inherent in CRT is the critical nature of research, introspection, and exploration (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda et al., 1995; Delgado

& Stefancic, 1997, 2001; Haney Lopez, 1996; Kendall, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Milner IV, 2007). By critical nature, I refer to the constant examination of norms, beliefs, and processes by which I, and others, operate, and how we collectively operate and interact with one another on a daily basis as a campus community. In this section, I review the historical origin of CRT; discuss the foci of the movement, and the relation to my study.

In its totality, CRT is a movement that is approximately 50 years old. In the context of the United States, CRT spawned out of critical legal studies during the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Peters, 2004). CRT "sprang up in the mid-1970s, as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, more or less simultaneously, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3-4). A decade later it was a discussion that had painted itself into a corner: "the emergence of Critical Race Theory in the eighties, we believe, marks an important point in the history of racial politics in the legal academy and, we hope, in the broader conversation about race and racism in the nation as a whole" (Crenshaw, Gotanda et al., 1995, p. xvi). Becoming established as a tool for analyzing and evaluating the formation of the United States and how power, privilege, and race affect our day-to-day lives, in the 1990s CRT began to be applied to education, primarily looking at educational policies, and eventually, was incorporated into educational philosophy and theory (Peters, 2004).

In order to accurately engage in critically focused conversations, it is important to lay out the basic tenets of CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) identify six themes or features as basic to CRT: ordinariness; "interest convergence;" "social construction" thesis; differential racialization; intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and voice-of-color. Ordinariness refers to racism as 'difficult to cure or address' and only the most obvious forms can be attended to with notions of

equality. Interest convergence is used to discuss the junction of goals and needs of elite and working-class whites to maintain their power and privilege through inaction. The social construction thesis submits that race and racial attributes are manufactured, which "creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics" (p. 8). Differential racialization refers to "the ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times" based on multiple factors and needs within the context of a given point in time. Intersectionality and anti-essentialism is the idea that people have their own racial "origins and ever evolving history" (p. 8) in which they have multiple conflicting identities and facets of their make-up as individuals. Finally, the voice-of-color is a concept in which individuals who belong to a minority group hold a "presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (p. 9), which led to the narrative and story telling movement within CRT. These tenets of CRT are tools that influence how I identify and question the fundamental nature of the existing structures of power and privilege.

Critical White Studies

Having discussed CRT, I next tighten the lens of critical studies and focus on Critical White Studies (CWS), why my study falls into this genre, and identify some issues that arise in utilizing CWS. Critical Whiteness Studies is a base of scholarship that interrogates whiteness as a dominant social structure which is reinforced as normal and the baseline to which all other experiences are compared and deemed deficient (Feagin, 2010; Gillborn, 2005; Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; McIntosh, 2001; Sullivan, 2006). A critical white study at its core is "an effort to get beyond received wisdoms and ask basic questions about race, power, and society. It is in the belief that all people can move toward a more decent, humane society by exposing ourselves to the best minds writing about vexing issues of race and by thinking about them critically"

(Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. xviii). CWS "places the spotlight of critical scrutiny on the power of whiteness and how it can be understood, interrupted, and transformed" (Apple, 1998, p. x). Although authors like Delgado, Stefancic, and Apple describe CWS in multiple formats and brevity, there is currently no available agreed upon definition. The exploratory nature of my study focuses on the understanding of whiteness as experienced by the participants and through their stories tries to "take the next step of connecting representations to their material effects" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 3).

Discussions about issues of race (in particular, whiteness), power, and privilege are lacking in frequency and intensity in the academy. Setting out to examine the experiences of white students, CWS serves as a tool for me as the researcher, and the students as the participants, to "open a way for [us as] whites to talk about race and racial problems acceptably and nondefensively [sic]" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. 1). As whites talking about race and racial problems, we must be aware of ontological expansiveness introduced by Sullivan (2006) as:

> one of the predominant unconscious habits of white privilege is that of ontological expansiveness. As ontologically expansive, white people tend to act and think as if all spaces – whether geographical, physical, linguistic, economic, or otherwise – are or should be available to them to move in and out of as they wish. (p. 10)

I join Allen (2004) and others who believe "white scholars, researchers, and educators have played, and continue to play, a major role in reproducing whiteness through the dismissal and devaluation of knowledge that places a critique of white supremacy at the center of analysis" (p. 131). The coopting of racial discussions must always be taken into account by whites to avoid the re-centering and reproduction of whiteness.

As with the research and writing on white privilege, pieces oriented within CWS run the continuum from anecdotal to applied, and empirical to theoretical. They also cover areas of

inquiry from issues of pedagogy, (Kincheloe, Steinberg et al., 1998) to self-reflective pieces, (Lensmire, 2011, 2008; Mansbach, 2005; Wise, 2008) to discussions about privilege and power (Kendall, 2006; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003, Lund & Colin III, 2010, Wise, 2009). The authors share valuable experiences and insight into what it means to be white as a person in systems that inherently value whiteness. There have been pieces written to inform white faculty, staff, and administrators, but little has explicitly focused on the experiences of white students at a PWI and more specifically, within a minority group context.

Campus Racial Dynamics and Culture

The predominantly white college and university (PWI) is the context in which this study occurs. PWIs are campuses "whose prevailing norms, values, and practices cater mostly to white students even though the total enrollment may have a small percentage of students of color as well as foreign students" (Chang, 2002, p. 3). The norms, values, and practices referred to by Chang create a normative white institutional culture in which the students carry out their daily routines. "A college's historical legacy of exclusion can determine the prevailing climate and influence current practices (Hurtado, 1992)" (Hurtado, Milem et al, 1998, p. 283). Culture is defined by Morgan (1997) as the "decisions and assumptions [of individuals that] are made quite unconsciously, as a result of our previous socialization and taken-for-granted knowledge, so that our action appears quite spontaneous" (p. 140). The facade of spontaneous action to which Morgan refers hides assumed knowledge that allows white students to operate within the comforting confines of norms that benefit and favor them.

As members of the majority culture at PWIs, white students do not face the same transitional expectations that minority students encounter. Chang (2002) noted that "campuses have historically held those newly entering groups of students responsible for adjusting to the

majority [white] culture rather than making broader changes to the campus environment to better serve all students" (p. 4). The onus is placed on minority students to conform to white norms and to embrace white culture. In their study, Rankin and Reason (2005) found that "students of color perceived the climate as more racist and less accepting than White students, even thought White students recognized racial harassment at similar rates" (p. 43). Norton & Sommers (2011) highlight the existence of white denial of systemic racism, which has led to the belief that racial discrimination to communities of color is less of a problem than discrimination towards privileged whites. This belief is often referred to as reverse discrimination and is a falsity created by whites to deflect the realities of contemporary issues of race and racism noted by (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The PWI is an environment in which white and racial/ethnic minority students exist within the unspoken constraints of a white reality. Unfortunately, white students are not as aware of these constraints as are the racial/ethnic minority students resulting in tension and a gap in acknowledgement of race-based privileges. Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) call for the "deconstruction of Whiteness, especially its advantages and privileges, [which] helps students to discover the direct impact of living in a society where being White is favored in the distribution of social capital and opportunity" (p. 84). There are a number of white students who are aware of privileges that they receive on a daily basis because they are white, referred to by some as social or racial justice allies.

Social and Racial Justice Ally Development

There is a niche in the literature that focuses on the development of social justice (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005) and racial justice (Reason, Roosa Miller et al., 2005) allies. Broido (2000) defines a social justice ally as a member of "dominant social groups (e.g., men,

Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership (Hardiman & Jackson, 1982; Washington & Evans, 1991)" (p. 3). Reason, Roosa Miller and Scales (2005) ground their work in Broido's social justice ally research and define a racial justice ally as "Whites who are actively working to end racism and racial oppression" (p. 531). Reason et al., Broido, and later Broido and Reason identify multiple areas of research relating to social-group membership, college student involvement and activism, importance of chance, and environmental (institutional, classroom, and peer-to-peer) influences. These pieces of research help inform my study, but differ from my work because I did not explicitly seek out social and political activists. Still, it is conceivable that some participants in my study may describe themselves and their experiences similarly to those whom other scholars labeled social justice or racial justice allies. Like my study, these studies focused on smaller numbers of participants and sought a snap shot of a particular institution and set of people with deeper interactions.

College Student Involvement

Research on college students often focuses on the institutional environment and ways in which students become involved in campus activities, organizations, and with peers, faculty, and administrators. Specific aspects of the student involvement and the campus environment are particularly relevant background information for my study.

I use Astin's (1999) definition of student involvement, which he described as the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Astin goes on to discuss various activities that fall within this range of consideration, such as time spent on campus, frequency of interactions with other students, and

student group membership. Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) refer to Pace's (1984) concept of,

> "quality effort" [which] is closely related to Astin's (1985) postulate that the amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the process of learning, including participation in leadership experiences and activities. (p. 16)

When referencing Astin's (1993a) research, Cole (2007) noted that "student involvement usually includes a wide range of social and academic activities within the college environment and with peers and faculty" (p. 254). It is within this range of social and academic activities that my study resides and begins to investigate a specific occurrence within the campus environment. For the purposes of this study, I define participating students as white students who are or were sustained members of racial/ethnic minority student groups. Sustained membership was defined as someone who is a recognized member of the student group and regularly attends student group meetings and events.

Social Group Membership

Since this study focused on experiences of students as sustained members of student groups, it is important to describe what are social and student groups. Peer culture and student social groups have been researched in higher education since the 1960s (Astin, 1968; Clark & Trow, 1966; Newcomb, 1966; Wallace, 1966) and continue to be studied in various ways today (antonio, 2004; Chang, 2002; Cole, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Kuh (1995) defines undergraduate peer groups as groups in "which individual members identify, affiliate, and seek acceptance and approval over a prolonged period of time" (p. 564). I define student groups as those that are officially sanctioned and recognized by the university, and racial/ethnic minority student groups as any mono-ethnic, minority student group within this set of recognized organizations.

Astin (1993b) and Milem (1994) both noted that when students participate in "diversity activities" such as taking courses, taking part in discussions on issues such as race and politics, and attending diversity focused workshops, they had an expanded sense of cultural awareness and racial understanding. I would include in the range of activities referenced by Astin and Milem the participation in student organizations. As students learn to work more effectively with diverse members, they create a holistic knowledge base that can serve them later in their professional (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003) and I would posit, personal lives. Though Milem (1994) and Cabrera (2012) focus on white students, these studies do not look at the experiences of white students as sustained members of racial/ethnic minority student groups, leaving their stories untold. The quantitative findings presented by antonio (2001) "suggest that the impact of diversity in the student body operates through the development of interracial friendship and socialization within a close interpersonal environment that is characterized by racial and ethnic diversity" (p. 93). Though PWIs still remain white, the increasing number of minority students provides a catalyst for more interracial interactions.

Minority student groups provide minority students with a space to share experiences and information, and to support one another. The formation of minority student groups "empowers those marginalized students by enabling them to play a more significant role in campus life" (Chang, 2002, p. 4). Cole (2007) discusses that minority students were more likely than their white counterparts to participate in "diversity-related" functions which could be a product of the PWI environment where minority students must adjust to whites norms and form support networks within the minority student community (Chang, 2002; Mayo, Murguia et al., 1995). Also, minority students may be reaching out to other minority groups to strengthen support networks. "From one perspective, the educational system reinforces social inequality. From

another point of view, however, the educational system is the best chance for ameliorating or eradicating social inequality based on race or ethnicity" (Mayo, Murguia et al., 1995, p. 542). Mitchell and Dell (1992) suggest, "as people become more comfortable with their racial identity…they are more likely to display interest and openness in both cultural and non-cultural activities" (p. 42). Minority student groups allow for self-exploration, and support minority students as a launching point for interracial and intercultural relations. "Quality interactions, those that intentionally maximize cross-racial interactions and encourage ongoing discussion contact can be encouraged, both inside and outside the classroom" (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 45).

Taking into account previous research on the increasing number of interracial interactions with a focus on minority student experiences, documentation from a majority student perspective would add to the knowledge base. My study serves as one piece of this broader picture and focuses on the experiences of white students participating in interracial interactions as members of racial/ethnic minority student groups. I found in the literature, as did antonio (2001), that studies do not focus directly on white student experiences and generally fall under the larger umbrella of diversity, which "have generally focused on the African American experience in predominantly White institutions but not the college campus as a multicultural whole" (p. 65). There is a growing literature focusing on other minority students and groups such as Latina/os (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres, 2005), Asian Americans (Kim, 2005; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, Ceja et al., 2004; Wang, Sedlacek et al., 1992), and bi-racial and multiracial students (Renn, 2000). There is a missing voice of white students who interact in a more direct manner in the growing multicultural context of the campus community.

College Environmental Context

Institutions of higher education, and in particular PWIs, are able to provide "positive influences" such as "curricular and co-curricular opportunities and accountability to a larger community [which] are important for encouraging diversity development in students" (Chavez, Guido-DiBrito et al., 2003, p. 446). Those positive and negative influences contribute to the experiences of students and can ultimately shape their perspectives for a long period of time. Umbach and Kuh (2006) discuss three forms of diversity, which contribute to environmental influences experienced by students: structural diversity, the number and nature of diversity initiatives, and diversity interactions.

Structural diversity is simply the number of individuals from various ethnic and racial groups in the student population. Diversity initiatives include the number and type of diversity courses (e.g., whether or not they are required), existence of cultural centers, presence of diversity workshops at orientation, etc. Diversity interactions cover the interpersonal experiences between people of different backgrounds, as well as exposure to different or alternative ideas and viewpoints. The authors succinctly summarize the research noting that, "through engaging with people from different backgrounds and with different life experiences, students are adding to the foundation of skills and dispositions that is essential for living…in an increasingly multicultural world" (Umbach & Kuh, 2006, p. 170). Bowman (2011) adds "the increased representation of students of color on college campuses (i.e., structural diversity) will lead to more frequent interactions among students from different racial/ethnic groups (i.e., informal interactional diversity), which then leads to student learning and retention" (p. 133).

The PWI environment that was the location of my study is a private liberal arts college. While research suggests that every college environment influences the experience of students, when it comes to diversity and student interactions, the nature of the liberal arts college may be

such that it promotes, or rather, does not inhibit student interactions as much as larger institutions. Pascarella et al. (2004) affirm Chickering and Reisser (1993) when they state that "simply by virtue of their relatively small size, liberal arts colleges present students with a more manageable social-psychological environment that invites greater levels of student engagement than do larger institutions" (p. 70). Umbach and Kuh (2006) wrote that "apparently the magnitude of the number of students from different backgrounds does not matter as much to deriving the benefits of diversity experiences as does the quality of interactions across differences that the [liberal arts college] campus environment encourages and nurtures" (p. 184).

Definition of White Racial Identity and White Racial Consciousness

Leach, Behrens, and LaFleur (2002) posited that, "White racial identity and White racial consciousness models attempt to explain the same general phenomenon, namely, the racial outlook of those people considered to be White in America" (p. 69). It is important for individuals engaged in a conversation to share common terms. Chiznik and Chiznik (2005) add that we "must have the same definition or understanding of these peace-related concepts in order to engage in critical discourse" (p. 793).

For the purposes of the current study, White Racial Identity was defined as "White individual's use of Whites as a reference group as well as their racist interface" (Leach, Behrens et al., 2002) with minority groups. Rowe et al. (1995, 1994) defined White Racial Consciousness as the manner in which white individuals think about others who they do not believe to be white. Leach, Behrens, and LaFleur (2002) noted critiques of the concepts of White Racial Consciousness and White Racial Identity including that the terms discuss and describe the same thing. Even so, for the purposes of my study, the two concepts were both taken into account as the project unfolded because they each may address minute differences in the experiences of

white students. Referencing Helms' WRID Model as a tool to gauge the progression of white individuals in regard to their identity, there still remains the question, what is white racial identity?

White Racial Identity Development

Helms' (1992) White Racial Identity Development (WRID) Model serves as a point of departure to discuss the "location" of the students interviewed. Helm's WRID Model is comprised of two phases, each with three stages. Phase one is labeled "The Abandonment of Racism" containing the following three stages: Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration. Phase Two, labeled "The Nonracist Identity Phase", containing the following three stages: Pseudo-Independence, Immersion-Emersion, and Autonomy. This model informed my study because of the focus on the experiences of white students as they participate in racial/ethnic minority student groups. Helms' model provides another vantage point from which to discuss their experiences. The model allowed me to situate participants along the continuum Helms provides as a triangulation tool during the analysis of data.

The first phase is best summarized by Helms (1992) when she stated that, " the abandonment of racism phase involves the recognition of racism and the evolution of self-protective strategies to contend with it" (p. 24). The contact stage is based upon the white individuals being oblivious to their race and other races. The disintegration stage is characterized by the individual experiencing that denial no longer is sufficient to mask race, and results in bewilderment. Reintegration is when individuals acknowledge that they are white and also consider white people superior to other racial group members.

The second phase dubbed "The Nonracist Identity Phase" is the "moral re-awakening" (Helms, 1992, p. 31) of the individual. The Pseudo-Independence phase is when an individual

has a positive White view and begins to realistically appraise their whiteness. In Immersion-Emersion, the individual seeks the "true" history of whites in the United States. Autonomy is the stage in which the individual is secure with their "whiteness" and their personal definition.

Helms' WRID Model is a linear model in which an individual progresses through each stage on the way to an end goal of a positive white identity. The WRID Model is based upon western standards and centered on individuals and experiences in the United States, which may limit its transferability to other countries and other racial groups with cultures and norms that differ from the general white American context. Helms' provides a continuum along which individuals may progress or regress as they navigate experiences and encounters in their life.

Helms' WRID is often used in college student research, and it is also often analytically criticized. For example, Mercer and Cunningham (2003) used quantitative methods to challenge the validity of Helms' WRID Model and the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS) created by Helms and Carter (1990). Mercer and Cunningham (2003) stated that, "[the WRID Model is] a rather vague model of identity development, Helms' conceptualization of white identity as developing statuses offered no specification as to how it would be measured" (p. 218). After conducting their own analyses of the WRID Model, Mercer and Cunningham proposed a remodeling of the WRIAS. One limitation of the study and critique by Mercer and Cunningham is that it rescaled an instrument with a large number of items. Other criticisms of Helms' WRID Model are that it is based solely in the terms of white-black paradigm ignoring all other minority groups (Rowe et al., 1995, Rowe et al., 1994 as cited by Leach, Behrens, & LaFleur 2002). "Helms' model may be best characterized as a theoretical model describing the nature of White identity rather than a developmental model of White identity" (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003, p.

219). Whether the model is valid or not, it acts as a tool to initiate conversations surrounding whiteness including white identity, consciousness, and privilege.

Concluding Thoughts

The intersection of white privilege, white identity and consciousness, and minority student group membership were explored through the experiences of white students in non-majority student groups. Springer et al. (1995) state that "despite increasing documentation of gaps in perceptions of racism on college campuses, very few studies have explored what shapes those perceptions among white students, particularly among students attending traditional (i.e., predominantly white, four-year, residential) institutions" (p. 3). Mitchell and Dell (1992) point out that "little attention has been given to how racial identity attitudes affect daily student functioning…" (p. 39). Though the calls by authors like Springer and Mitchell and Dell were made in the early to mid-1990s, their essence is still applicable today.

The body of existing diversity research provides a basis for understanding the college campus environment primarily from the perspective of multiple racial/ethnic minority groups as they enter a white environment. The overall knowledge base, however, has been dominated by the covert and normative experiences of whites allowing whiteness to remain unacknowledged by whites. Combining and turning these two contentiously related areas of research upside down allows for the telling of experiences of white students who participate in racial/ethnic minority student groups to be told. The unacknowledged realm of whiteness by whites creates a void in the literature, an absence of perspective, and ultimately contributes to the reification of whiteness and white dominance.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline the methodology that was used in my study. The goal of this exploratory study was to investigate the experiences of white undergraduate college students who negotiated membership participation in racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups at a predominantly white institution (PWI). I cover the theoretical framework, the research design, participant demographics, the data that were collected, and the procedures used to conduct data analyses.

Research Design

I used the method of portraiture developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) to explore the experiences of white students who participated as members of racial/ethnic minority student groups. Portraiture is based upon the experiences of Lawrence-Lightfoot as a subject of portrait paintings at several points in her life. She reflected that,

> Portraits did not capture me as I saw myself; that they were not like looking in the mirror at my reflection. Instead they seemed to capture my essence–qualities of character and history some of which I was unaware of, some of which I resisted mightily, some of which felt deeply familiar. But the translation of image was anything but literal. It was probing, layered and interpretive. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 4)

With these experiences as a point of departure, the artist becomes the researcher and the subject of the portrait is now the participant in the study. The canvas transitions into the pages of text, merging with the context of the study materializing as each portrait in this study. I believe captured best by Lawrence-Lightfoot, “the portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 3). At the core of my study is what these particular students

experienced through their interactions in alternate contexts and how they negotiated those experiences.

Portraiture focuses heavily on the context in which the research is conducted. Portraitists use in-depth descriptions of the environment and more stylistic writing to both convey context of the site and to reach a broader audience. Lawrence-Lightfoot makes the point that "the only way to interpret people's actions, perspectives, and talk is to see them in context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 50). Context as an integral part of portraiture is represented in three pieces: historical, personal, and internal. The historical context provides glimpses of the institutional culture and history in which the research endeavor is situated. The personal context is specific to the "perch and perspective" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 11) of the researcher in the study. The goal is to allow for a clear representation of where the researcher is and what he (in my case) brings to the process so that readers can make informed interpretation about the text and portrait in front of them; hence my inclusion of a prologue describing my orientation towards the research. Internal context is the environment in which the portraitist and subject are immersed.

Portraiture relies on the rich and detailed description of the internal context to take the reader into the field with the portraitist. By blending artistic and empirical tools, portraiture presented the opportunity to convey the lived experiences of the students in a rich and engaging manner while still maintaining the necessary and expected rigor of research. At the same time, portraiture was presented by the authors' in an easily understandable and approachable manner but contained an intricate method that required an extended amount of time not conducive with the timeline of a dissertation. The result of this mismatch is the current study grounded in what I

would describe as a modified version of portraiture crafted while in the field to remain true to the essence of the methodology and to meet the needs of the study.

Context

The location of the study is a small liberal arts college located on the West coast of the United States referred to as Sunshine Valley College (SVC). With a majority of white students constituting its student body, the college has a dominant white culture seeded with white privilege and inherently holds whiteness as the norm. The PWI provides the backdrop for the study and context in which I ground the experiences of the participants and from which their stories emerged.

As noted on its website (College, 2008), SVC was founded in the early 1900s and is self-described as a "small, highly selective and diverse college" (para. 2). SVC is located in a suburban community outside a large city in the Southwest United States. A local metropolitan newspaper described the city of Urban Suburb as a small town in a big city with a multicultural neighborhood. SVC is one of only a few liberal arts colleges in this major metropolitan area, which provides students with access to a multitude of cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities. The campus is picturesque with several buildings designed by a famous architect who also designed multiple noteworthy projects in the larger surrounding metropolitan area. Almost three-quarters of the 2,000 students live on-campus in residence halls. When this study was conducted, all first-year students were required to live on campus and then during the 2009 – 2010 academic year, all first- and second-year students were required to live on campus. The residence halls on campus are student-governed and coed.

SVC enrolled students from nearly every state as well as the District of Columbia, and well over 15 foreign countries. At the time of the study, there were 56% female and 44% male

students. Demographically, the student breakdown was 6.8% African American, 14.9% Asian American, 55.6% Caucasian, 2.7% International, 15.2% Latino/a, 1% Native American, and 8% declined to state. There were 150 full-time faculty demographically represented as: 6.7% African American, 12.6% Asian American, 67.4% Caucasian, and 13.3% Latino/a. The gender representation of the faculty was 45% female and 55% male.

I selected SVC for several reasons. First, the region of the country allowed for the possibility of a PWI with a higher number of r/e ms attending. Subsequently, this provided the potential for many r/e ms groups and interactions between white and r/e ms and afforded the greatest potential number of participants for the study. Second, being a Southern California native, I had some familiarity with the Southwestern context and yet, had the opportunity to remain an outsider with respect to the context of the institution. This provided a unique vantage point for me as observer and researcher, as I proceeded with the study.

The campus is nestled in the heart of a residential area blocks away from a busy thoroughfare. The lower-middle class areas that surround the college can mislead one into thinking the college reflects the hardy to modest neighborhoods. With a large institutional endowment and an annual tuition cost of nearly 50 thousand dollars (at the time of the study), those attending the college are from what might be considered well-to-do families. There are in fact students from upper middle class families but also students who receive financial assistance, and most students are not from nearby locations. From my perspective, SVC exists within an interesting mix of connection to and isolation from the surrounding community.

Participants

The participants for the study were four, white undergraduate students attending SVC who participated as members of institutionally recognized, mono-racial/ethnic minority student

groups such as Black Student Alliance or Asian/Pacific Islander Student Group. White students were the focus of this study for several reasons. First, as I noted in the Prologue I have had several salient moments throughout my life where my whiteness and participation in racial/ethnic minority groups have been challenges and rewarding. Second, I have found that the experiences of whites as members of mono-racial/ethnic minority student groups are lacking in the literature. Third, I wanted to turn the critical lens of empirical research on whiteness and the normative, systemic aspects, which allow it to become unrecognizable to the majority of whites. Finally, this line of inquiry provided a launching point to further explore the interactions between white and racial/ethnic minority students within mono-racial/ethnic student groups set against the backdrop of a PWI.

The following are terms that I used as parameters for potential participants in my study:

- Participants are white students who were members of racial/ethnic minority student groups.
- Membership is defined as someone who regularly attended student group meetings and events as well as supported the mission/goals of the student group.
- Racial/ethnic minority student groups are any ethnic student group officially sanctioned and recognized by SVC such as the Black Student Alliance or the Armenian Student Association. I excluded multicultural groups from the sample because by their very nature they promote an open environment in which all ethnic groups are overtly and implicitly welcomed.
- Undergraduate students in this study were of 'traditional' college age, ranging from 18 to 22 years of age. Traditional college age students were selected because those students who are non-traditional in age may have more and varied life experiences that could alter

and/or supplement their motivating factors and experiences in relation to racial/ethnic minority student group participation.

Drawing on my experience with a pilot study of white student experiences in racial/ethnic minority student groups, it was expected that there would be a potentially small target group of participants available on any given campus. In order to address that possibility, I used a combination of purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) supplemented with snowball or chain sampling techniques (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I had access to an onsite informant and subsequently their ties to the campus, providing me with a direct link to student organizations. I initially worked with this person to take advantage of their personal connections and rapport with the targeted pool of participants using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is when a specific individual or individuals is selected because of a finite amount of people existing in the given population (Patton, 2002). My informant provided me with six names and contact information of possible participants that met my study criteria and informed me of several other people on campus that may be willing to participate.

After the informant provided me with a list of potential participants, I contacted them individually about possible participation in my study. I utilized email primarily but also used instant messaging, social networking sites such as Facebook, phone calls, and text messages as preferred by the participants. Once interview times were arranged, I employed snowball sampling asking the preliminary group of participants if they knew any other peers that met the criteria for the study and if they were willing to put me in contact with them. Snowball or chain sampling is when the researcher uses existing leads such as colleagues, professional networks, and current participants in the study to locate initial and additional relevant participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Patton, 2002). As a precaution, I obtained contact information of the

leaders of the r/e ms groups on campus from my informant to ensure the ability to reach a sufficient number of participants. I contacted the leaders of the r/e ms groups asking if they could connect me with members of their groups that met my criteria for the study. The results of these combined efforts were a participant group of four individuals, two males (Ronaldinho and Felix) and two females (Shilo and Margaret); the names used are pseudonyms. The participants and their stories are re-presented in their portraits that immediately follow this chapter.

Data Collection

I conducted in-depth interviews with the four students who met the aforementioned criteria one time during fall, 2008. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and probes that were both pre-planned and informed by information received on-site. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with notes taken during the interview. Three interviews lasted between one and one-half to two and one-half hours and were in-person; one interview lasted nearly six hours via telephone. The length of the interviews depended upon the type of conversation and rapport that developed with participants.

I centered my questions on the experiences of the participants purposefully narrowing in on issues of race as we progressed. In particular, I was interested in what it meant to these participants to be white as they moved in between the white and predominantly racially/ethnically diverse environments at SVC. The examination of their experiences required me to gather information on where the participants came from, why they chose to join a racial/ethnic minority student group, and what they experienced as members of those student groups. [See protocol in Appendix] I was intentionally mindful not to unduly influence the interview process and interactions with the participants by being too forceful or leading with any specific line of questioning. "The researcher must set aside her need for control, order, and

stability and submit to the complexity and instability of real lived experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 191). Immediately following each interview, I recorded my observations, thoughts, and reactions to ensure that I captured my reflections as soon as possible so that they remained fresh.

I also collected drawings from the participants based upon an open prompt and made several trips to the campus to conduct general site observations. The drawings allowed the participants to artistically re-present a salient moment for them on campus in which they saw themselves as a racialized being. We then spent some time talking about the drawing and situation from which the drawing emerged. At the beginning of each interview we covered the requisite research protocol information and personal introductions. Halfway through the interview protocol, I had each participant take a few minutes to draw a picture using blank paper, pens, and pencils that I provided. My instructions for the drawing, informed by (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2004), asked participants to draw a picture about what their first experience as a member/participant of the [individually relevant] racial/ethnic minority student group was like. We then discussed the meanings and images in each of their pictures. I concur with Rasberry (2001) that we (as researchers) become conduits for the representation of our participants lived experiences. Coupling the drawings with conversation about the images provided depth and stories that would not have been available with solely a drawn picture or conversation (Haney, Russell et al., 2004). The pictures also provided another piece of data to use in the triangulation process and served as a resource used to assist in the development of follow up questions during the interviews.

Prior to the interviews, I spent several days on the SVC campus sitting in various public spaces such the student union, open air seating areas, libraries, cafeterias, etc. to observe the

campus environment. It was my intent to observe the campus climate, obtain information for the institutional/environmental portrait, and to acclimate myself with the feel of campus prior to speaking with participants. “The research stance evolves from quiet watchfulness – where the portraitist is mostly taking in stimuli and listening carefully – to the more purposeful activities of initiating relationships with actors, scheduling interviews, and developing a plan of action” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 187).

Onsite observations were used to provide a context for me as the researcher to develop a feeling and picture of what SVC looked like on a daily basis. I conducted four of the six observational visits prior to interviewing the students so that I might better understand references that they made during our time together. I also used the information gathered to generate prompts and follow-up questions. The observations lasted for approximately an hour per location and I visited each site at various times throughout the day to see how each environment changed. I also supplemented my observations with information collected from the college website, visitor’s center, library, and campus newspaper.

The essence of my study was to explore the experiences of white students through interactions in alternate contexts, specifically r/e ms groups. The sample size for this study may be considered by some to be a delimiter, but it is appropriate for my chosen methodology, my area of research, and a result of the available participants at SVC that matched my criteria. The lessons learned at a diverse PWI such as Sunshine Valley College may be useful to institutions looking for ways to support similarly situated white students in their confrontation of personal privileges as well as developing interactions amongst their differing students bodies.

While collecting data, I took detailed field notes and reviewed them at the close of each research period. “With each stage of data collection, at the close of each day, the portraitist

gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data, and tries to make sense of what she has witnessed" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). This begets a constantly iterative and interpretive process, which generated connections and reconnections between the data, questions, and direction of the research referred to as the 'Impressionistic Record.' I had the opportunity to evaluate and reevaluate my position and biases, the questions and direction of the research, the kinds of data being shared, and the need for change and follow-up questions. It was important that I maintained a balanced representation of myself within the research process, which was also in keeping with Portraiture. With that being said, I remained cognizant to not insert myself into the research process in such a way that detracted from the picture of the participants and focus of the study. Additionally, I used data gathered from informal conversations, documents, artifacts, and photographs as part of my analysis and understanding. The data informed my probes and follow up questions during the interviews, supplemented my understanding of the environment in which the participants existed, and later assisted in my recall of the environment during the analyses.

Analytic Strategy

Portraiture is a method in which emergent themes are thought about during onsite data collection as well as in the post-collection phase when the researcher has returned home. Adhering to the analytic tenets of portraiture (synthesis, convergence, and contrast), I constructed themes from my body of data. The modes are referred to as repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, institutional and cultural rituals, triangulation, and revealing patterns. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997) outline the five mode process of analysis as follows;

> The first (and most common) identifies the visible and audible refrains spoken and enacted by actors over and over again in various contexts. Emergent themes are also

> heard in the resonant metaphors voiced by the actors, capturing in a few words a wide angle of experience and deep meanings shared by many. These metaphors are often embroidered into the rituals and ceremonies that symbolize – through art, music, dance, and poetry – what the institution values. The portraitist also discovers emergent themes through triangulating data from a variety of sources and underscoring the points of convergence. But patterns do not always develop out of convergence; they must also be discerned through reflecting on the dissonant strains, through discovering the order in chaos, through finding the coherence in what often seems inchoate and scattered to the actors in the setting. (p. 216)

The various modes discussed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis encourage a cyclical research process in which the initial set of research questions and assumptions are questioned, reinforced, and modified with every interaction. "Researchers' day-to-day process of listening for emergent themes functions as a sort of on-site hypothesis finding and testing. At the end of the day, portraitists review field notes, log observations while they are fresh in their minds, and begin to reflect on the emergence of possible themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 217).

Once themes were identified from the transcripts and other data were pieced together for their portraits, I contacted participants to have them review their portraits and selected quotes. I sought their thoughts about the overall piece and to gain input on the representativeness of what I included. At that time, I offered them the opportunity to provide written statements to supplement quotes that I used as additions to their initial statements presented in the final product and an opportunity to request certain pieces be removed with written support so I could include their input in the process. By interacting with the participants to produce a negotiated text, I wanted to adequately represent their voices and experiences (Fontana & Frey 2000) while balancing my positionality as author and responsibility to provide a comprehensive picture and coherent research product. Stringer (1999) adds that "knowledge acquisition/production proceeds as a collective process, engaging people who have previously been the 'subjects' of research in

the process of defining and redefining the corpus of understanding" (p. 11)**.** The use of member checking and various forms of data (observations, documents, drawings, etc.) were my attempt at triangulation, which "strengthens a study by combining methods" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) describe the triangulation process as "emergent themes [that] arise out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings" (p. 204).

In addition to multiple forms of data and member checking, I had two colleagues review my data, findings, and implications. I purposefully chose one peer-reviewer who has similar methodological and epistemological views to mine and one who holds differing views to ensure that groupthink was intentionally avoided. In the spirit of constant self-documentation, I wrote up my initial assumptions, expectations, and thoughts about the selected institution and participant population prior to my site visit and continued the journaling process throughout my study. I later used these particular pieces of data to account for possible bias in the data analysis process and to assist with the iterative process of data analysis.

Limitations

This exploratory study has three limitations that I believe are inherent and expected when conducting qualitative research in general and pursuing this line of inquiry specifically. The first is that the number of participants is small and focused to ensure individual experiences are given appropriate attention and their stories are heard. The second is the participant criteria for the study reduces the population to a minute potential pool of participants on any given campus. The four participants in this study were all that I could gather at SVC. The third is to consider the applicability of a particular methodology to use during a time constrained process such as a dissertation. Making a functionally sound choice to proceed with a methodology that is not

completely congruent with the dissertation process and timeline can pose unexpected challenges tangential to the research process. The exploratory nature of the study provides implications that are sound yet preliminary because of the topic and serve as a launching point for further lines inquiry.

CHAPTER 4

MARGARET

On my way to our meeting, I was reminded by the sunshine and balmy temperature that I was on the west coast and no longer in Michigan in late January. The late afternoon sky was a brilliant blue; the trees showing off their emerald hews across campus. The students all around me were immersed in their day sitting around on benches, walking in pairs, and flanking the main entrance water feature while tossing around a Frisbee. I arrived outside the college library realizing that Margaret and I had not exchanged physical descriptors so I hoped that I looked just out of place enough to draw her over. After several semi-tense minutes, a very confident and energetic young woman with dark hair approached me with inquisitive eyes and a bright smile wearing a red sweater and blue jeans.

Margaret was a 19 year old second year student at Sunshine Valley College (SVC) pursuing an Arts and Humanities Degree. I found out quite early that Margaret had a passionate relationship with the English language, “I have loved the English language my entire life and that wasn’t something that my classmates or peers shared so I enjoyed watching kind of obscure films and reading comic books and all these very American things that um, we never did as kids.” This may not seem very noteworthy at first but as I spoke with Margaret, I found that she self-described as “not a typical American college student or a typical participant for this study.” Margaret not only explored her own understanding of what being white and whiteness were to her, she also helped me reevaluate and interrogate what I thought being white and whiteness were.

Margaret was an interesting participant because she was not white. She made it clear in our initial contact via email and on several other occasions during our time together that she was not white, she was Armenian. Margaret's email read,

> I heard about your study and am interested in participating. The only thing is that though I am categorized as "white," I am not of European descent-my bloodlines run to Turkey (historically Armenia) so I think that makes me Asian/Middle Eastern. Then again, Armenia is in the Caucus, hence the term "Caucasian"--so maybe I'm as "white" as anyone can get! ;)

As we sat down and got settled into our discussion, Margaret elaborated on her email,

> I am Armenian so, I am not white in the sense that I am not of western European decent but you know, skin color wise I am pretty white and all of my forms I am always categorized as Caucasian. So, I guess I consider myself white to that extent. But I do consider myself separate from typical white America but it is harder to see that on my face.

Her family engrained in her the importance of language, customs, food, and family. She passed along her cultural knowledge by providing me with a several minute crash course in Armenian history, which was unexpected, informative, and appreciated. The genocide of Armenians in 1915 has had a lasting effect on her family and tightly focused their belief in the preservation of their cultural ideals, including having Margaret attend Armenian schools from kindergarten through the eighth grade.

Margaret began by telling me about her early experiences in this Armenian grade school and reflected on her worldview as a child,

> When I was younger I remember thinking that everyone in the world was Armenian. I did not understand the difference between an Asian face or an African-American face to me everybody automatically must know the language that I speak and all that because that was my world.

The community in which her family lived reinforced Margaret's early worldview; her hometown is one of the largest concentrations of Armenians in the United States. I was unfamiliar with Armenian schools so asked her to explain them, what was the format, in what language classes

were taught, etc. She told me that most courses were taught in English such as math and science, while courses such as Armenian language, Armenian history and religion were taught in Armenian. Students had to wear uniforms with Armenian writing on them and the school recognized and celebrated all Armenian holidays.

It was easy for me to see why Margaret believed that the entire world was Armenian because as a young child she was immersed in an Armenian environment inside and outside of her home. The tight-knit school had approximately 500 students. The small size and community orientation ensured that most students and families interacted outside of the classroom, too. There were several venues for extracurricular activities such as "an Armenian YMCA type place, we would all go play sports there and be scouts there. There were cultural organizations in the community that we were all a part of." In addition, there were birthday parties, play dates, etc. with the same core group of Armenian children.

Shortly after arriving in the United States, Margaret's mother opened a daycare center in their home, which allowed Margaret to experience families and children from outside of her familiar Armenian circles. "So at that point that is when I started having more interactions with non-Armenians becoming more aware of my neighborhood that I lived in. I have always lived in white neighborhoods, non-Armenian neighborhoods, just by chance." A married, mixed race couple was touring the new daycare when Margaret met them,

> I will always remember it…they were a couple who had just gotten married and had their first child and the woman was Japanese and the husband was, I guess just white American or of European decent…I remember asking whether they planned on teaching the kid Japanese, their baby Japanese. Because for me I was taught that any loss of culture or language is a big deal… it is like an erasure of who you are. The father said of course I want my kid to speak Japanese. They ended up taking her to Japanese school and I remember later my mom told me that they were speaking about that exchange and that he was very impressed to see a child of immigrants living in the US who still is managing to speak English so well…So he was impressed that I was able to speak English so well but I was still interested in maintaining culture and where you are from and all of that.

Margaret's views on race and ethnicity were heavily influenced by her Armenian upbringing and history but began to shift as she experienced more of the other in her daily routine. She reflected "at school and in my house was all Armenian but anytime I was outside on the street…I would say towards the end of elementary school and definitely middle school I was already integrating into the outside world."

Margaret wanted to go to a public school that was not solely Armenian for several reasons, including difference in student population, being closer to home, and having a higher level of perceived academic strength. Her immersion in all things Armenian led Margaret to develop an intensely strong sense of self. She was confidant in who she was and extremely knowledgeable about from where her family came. She possessed a strong self-awareness from which she could explore and wrestle with other cultures and customs that swirled around her.

When she transitioned to high school at grade nine, Margaret and her family chose for her to attend a public high school. The transition was spurred by Margaret's desire for a diversified educational experience and more rigorous academic quality. It was clear that Margaret was extremely proud of her heritage and cultural upbringing but spoke of a growing desire to socialize with non-Armenians coupled with an interest in American things. She recalled,

> I think I consciously did want to hang out with non-Armenians. I was exotic to them and they were exotic to me. It was interesting to learn about where they were from, their cultural habits and all that. So there was a lot of learning going on.

A by-product of her Armenian cultural immersion was that Margaret was not well versed in American social norms and acceptable practices. Her intentional integration into the world around her later assisted her transition to a public high school, although she noted still experiencing culture shock.

> You know you don't learn when you are in an all Armenian community, you don't learn what is okay to say to somebody of a certain background and what is not okay…So I learned about, not political correctness, but just the American kind of norms for interacting.

Although, Margaret sought a public and diverse environment compared to her K8 experience, she estimated that her high school was "well over 50% Armenian." Asked how her high school and K8 experiences differed, she informed me that the Armenian students "were Armenians from different parts of the world" and that being an Armenian from Bulgaria or Armenia or the Middle East is as different as a "Jew from Russia is totally different than a Jew from the US." The bigger culture shock to Margaret was having classmates who were Asian, Latino and African American. She described her early experiences attending a public high school and interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds as "interesting, it wasn't scary but it was different but I adjusted well to it."

In high school, Margaret sought out difference and different experiences than those she was exposed to at her Armenian elementary school. She joined multiple clubs including the Art Club and Journalism Club, which allowed her to work closely with students from various backgrounds. Not only did she befriend students from other cultures, she was able to explore cultural norms that she was not privy to while at an all-Armenian school. For example, although she was taught American history, she was not taught about not using "the n-word when you are referring to a black person." She noted that it was never "really stressed because there was really no opportunity at that point to interact with a black person. So I learned about the American kind of norms for interacting with different people." Margaret recalled that her friendship circle provided an environment that made learning those norms welcoming because of the patience and willingness of her friendship circle to share, teach and learn.

Margaret's search for difference led her to trade experiences and stories with her peers while in high school,

> I learned little words from their language and they learned little words from my language. I learned about what happened to their people and vice versa. It was definitely a useful learning experience for when I finally entered the real world in college where I am all over the place working and doing things with all sorts of people.

As she reflected on her high school experiences compared to friends who went to an all-Armenian high school, she referred to their differing world perspectives. Margaret said her friends had a "huge mind gap and they still consciously seclude themselves to the Armenian community because it is safer that way. So I am glad that I got that learning experience in high school."

As our discussion moved from high school into her college experiences, Margaret shared her perceptions of the large city in which she lives and how high school experiences with racism prepared her to navigate the collegiate environment. She added,

> [This town] is like a pressure cooker of different ethnicities and races just clashing every single day…I did have moments where I had things said to me or generalizations thrown at me or stereotypes thrown at me just because of my bloodlines and it was hurtful you know in the beginning because I was a kid, it is tough to hear that.

Margaret faced racist comments and generalizations about her ethnicity with which she was not completely prepared to deal coming from an insular and supportive Armenian environment as a child.

Comparing her experiences to those of her Armenian friends, Margaret explained that she was able to stand out from her peers and embrace her ethnicity, shedding the pressures of assimilation brought about by the racism she felt. She talked about her Armenian peers,

> I think those moments for a lot of my classmates that were Armenian made them feel ashamed of who they were and a lot of them assimilated very quickly to our high school, some of them don't speak Armenian anymore and they kind of forgot on purpose and they don't want to seem Armenian.

When dealing with racial negativity related to being Armenian, she felt that "you can't hide something that is obvious [being Armenian]. I think that people who try to hide who they are despite how obvious it is that they are different…they just look silly. That is just kind of sad." Margaret took these attacks and challenges turning them to her advantage and strengthening her pride in her heritage and familial traditions,

> For me, it made me even prouder of who I was, um, I always enjoyed being different I mean, in Armenian school I was the only kid from Eastern Europe. Everybody else was from the Middle East. So that always set me apart so I am glad. I am glad that I took those challenges to my identity as a reason to love who I am even more. So that shaped me a lot and it also taught me to treat other people with the same respect that I would want to be treated with in regards to my culture, my ethnicity, and where I am from. At SVC if I hadn't learned those things, I feel that I would have gotten into a lot of trouble here…

She cultivated a sense of pride, a badge of honor of sorts about being different. "The fact that I am different and maintained what makes me different has helped me a lot. I feel that not only can I relate better to people who are the children of immigrants but immigrants themselves."

Compared to the substantial Armenian population of a nearby city, Margaret was amazed to find less than 10 Armenian students on the SVC campus. Additionally, she was surprised to find that the campus had a very politically correct (PC) culture so much so that she felt it stifled honest conversation,

> I consider politically correct language to be very uncomfortable. It forces you to become so self conscious that you might even forget what it is that you are talking about, so I feel like no one really talks about the fact that a lot of us kind of secretly hate having to speak very politically correct.

The campus PC culture impeded her ability to discuss issues related to race, ethnicity and difference with the majority of her peers and she had to find a subgroup or subculture in which to talk openly,

> it is like a loose underground. It is kind of like you look them in the eye in passing but you don't say hello (she gives a head nod gesture and sideways glance). In a way it allows me to take things less seriously and I get along easier with those students that agree with that point of view and in my opinion I feel like the liberal point of view here at SVC because the majority viewpoint is that we have to be very PC all the time. So in that sense, me being different and knowing what it means to be discriminated against has helped me kind of a find a group of friends on campus that are willing to put all that aside and just talk. And it is okay if we make a joke about the other person's ethnicity.

She was able to find refuge in a group of people from across campus who came together at various times to openly discuss and joke about matters while directly addressing tough issues.

Throughout our conversation, Margaret referred directly and indirectly to being Americanized and yet, not familiar with the American experience. She explained,

> I realized in a lot of my English classes is that, is how phenomenally little I know about the American experience because of the way I grew up. I know more about the immigrant experience so anytime there is a story or a piece literature that we read that is about that (immigrant experience) I am always the first to get it but whenever it is references to racism or relationships between maybe Native Americans and Anglos that came to live here, for me it is always harder to pick up on it and I don't really participate in those moments in class. I noticed that more white American students whose families have been here for generations, they understand it way more.

She was reminded on a regular basis about her status as an Americanized immigrant instead of an American. Whether it was in the classroom reading American literature or out on campus amongst her peers, Margaret found that each instance "forces me to separate myself throughout the day where I am reminded that I wasn't born here." She told me that she understood "all the idioms [and wordplay in the American context] and all that but I am not really like a pure American. Maybe my kids will be, you know?" The constant reminder that she was considered other resulted in a fragmented self-perception and connection to her peers and surroundings.

The mix of Margaret's race, ethnicity, self-perception, and white skin color placed her in a unique position of being able to interact with minority and majority communities and foreign and domestic cultures in the American context. Margaret's mix of experiences assisted her in

becoming attuned to nuanced aspects of discourse. Her love and fascination with discourse started in high school with movies and carried over into the spoken word and her love of the English language. “I have always loved reading and loved watching films and hearing others speak but here at SVC I became a lot more sensitive to it, a lot more attuned to noticing the finer aspects of discourse.”

We transitioned from discussions of discourse and Americanization to a personal theory that Margaret has related to cultural responsibility in the Armenian tradition, which she refers to as “ethnic weight.” Margaret said that preserving the Armenian culture from generation to generation was extremely important to her, her family, and to all Armenians. She elaborated that “culturally it is part of who we are which is [why we as Armenians] don’t intermix, don’t marry people that are not Armenian.” All choices should revolve around preserving the Armenian traditions from choosing friends to which outside organizations one affiliates. Margaret stressed above all that preserving the Armenian language is paramount. The elders still fearing the effects of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 drove that fear into her as well. She caught herself in routine situations defaulting to her ethnic weight training: “I feel like my parents have successfully passed that weight on to me and without even realizing it I often in my head I will disapprove when I see people of different cultures dating.” Her disapproval was fueled by an anxiety of each person possibly losing their individual cultural identities and subsequently a loss for any children of that relationship. Reflecting on how ethnic weight has affected her, Margaret noted, “the ethnic weight is really tough to bear and the older I am getting, I am conscious of it more and more and at all time…lately I have been feeling a lot of animosity towards that ethnic weight.”

Margaret remembered something she wanted to tell me that “frustrates me a lot as a white student (motions to herself or her skin),” and the passage of guilt at SVC onto people with white

skin. The implication is that as I look at her white skin, I would certainly not categorize her as black or Asian/Pacific Islander or racial/ethnic minority student. She explained that on campus there are several "ethnic student groups for example the black student association. They constantly remind [everyone] about how white people did this, white did that, white did this. There are panels on how ludicrous whiteness is and reminders how horrible slavery was." Margaret stressed that although these events were horrible, she feels they were historical atrocities that "took place generations before and just because they are white does not mean that they thought that it was fair or that it was correct."

Margaret talked more about the campus environment and how the constant reminder of historical transgressions at the hands of whites led to white student frustrations. "I feel like it is a reverse racism in a way where white students are made, are constantly reminded that they are part of a tradition that made a huge mistake and it was very inhumane." She believed that this kind of campus climate lead to political correctness on the part of white students, not in the spirit of being inclusive but as a means of protection. She added, "they are doing it [being politically correct] out of fear and I think that that does not promote a diverse community. I think it separates people even more." Along with white student frustration Margaret felt that white guilt was fostered inside and outside the classroom.

"And about the white guilt, one thing that I didn't appreciate was all these reminders about how bad it is to be white, how white people oppress everybody else and all that." Margaret's opposition is two-sided. First, she did not believe that her white peers should be made to feel like they directly aided the oppression of multiple peoples and second, it is not a history that she was a part of at all as an immigrant. She said, "that is the weird thing about SVC is that white people are speaking bad about being white as opposed to promoting understanding. They

are kind of contributing this reverse racism and separation within the on campus community." Talking about American history not being her history, Margaret explained,

> I look like and I speak like I am 'white' but my ancestors are from half way across the world, you know but I found myself beginning to feel guilty for these things. Beginning to feel guilty about slavery and all that as opposed to just condemning it as an outsider. That was when I realized that I was beginning to feel that way and that was again a cause for concern because I felt like I was being brain washed into feeling guilt and kind of being ashamed for something, if I think about it a little bit I realize, 'wait a minute, this has nothing to do with me.'

We transitioned from the adoption of white guilt to the larger white campus community's interactions with white guilt and Margaret's observations of that process.

The panels and discussions that Margaret attended left her feeling that whites are self-deprecating about their whiteness in an attempt to say to the campus community "please don't hate me." When she saw white student members of white student anti-racist clubs speak so negatively about whiteness she heard, "I am white and I feel guilty and I feel like this sort of club [will] show that I am not racist and that I don't like being white and that I am ready to help these other, non-white people on campus." She felt that this is a "backwards" way to act and only added to the separation of the campus community. Fostering white guilt on campus made Margaret sad. She also felt that no matter what the ethnicity or immigration status of a white student, they were excluded from the multicultural hall and,

> lumped into this group where we have to hold like semester long classes on campus that focus on whiteness and this and that, and I have attended discussions about that subject on campus and they are so, they speak so condemningly about being white when actually being white means nothing.

Margaret believed that white students on campus would not feel comfortable admitting that they are politically correct because they are attempting to protect themselves from accusations of being racist. She could say this because she considered herself "separate, I don't consider myself like a white student on campus and I don't consider myself ah, of a different

race. Like I am half way between the two." Margaret wanted to step beyond whiteness and monolithic color categories to focus on ethnicity and familial origin, taking issue with generalized statements about whiteness. "When I hear people say, 'oh yeah, you are white', I don't like that. I feel like the connotation of white has become something, like white people are bland, white people are boring."

As we talked about whiteness, we both came to use the term "baggage" that is associated with whiteness when generalized statements are made. Margaret shared,

> I feel like the term white has become almost like well, not a racial slur. It might be extreme to say but it is a way of offending someone, 'Awe, you are just white.' 'Stupid white people.' You know, stuff like that.

Another term we came to use during our time together was duality when referring to Margaret's status as a white student and a minority student. Thinking about her duality, she told me how SVC is not representative of the larger city in which it is located. She reiterated that 10 minutes from her Armenian community she is in a world which knows very little about her ethnicity and cultural values. "So there is definite duality…I feel like I have taken a flight across the country where there is no Armenians at all, all of a sudden I am anonymous in every way, shape, and form."

Margaret's feelings of anonymity gave way to realizing that contempt existed for both Armenians and whites when she arrived on campus,

> One thing that changed is that um, when I was younger I was less aware of how much of disdain there is out there for Armenians in [the city] and for white people. So I learned about the disdain for white people when I came to SVC, I learned about what people, what negative impressions they had of Armenians.

To further illustrate her point, she told me about encountered racism while working on a political campaign for an Armenian candidate. Working in a phone bank, Margaret spoke with a woman voter who said she would never vote for a candidate whose name was Armenian and abruptly

hung up. She recalled feeling hurt and described it as “a child like hurt; it wasn’t anger it was just pain.” Margaret said that she learned a lot at that moment. She learned that while there are opportunities to interact and learn about others in the world, there are also lots of opportunities to be hurt. Margaret was clear that she saw it as an opportunity to challenge or change stereotypes that exist within people.

CHAPTER 5

RONALDINHO

I find myself back in the quad at Sunshine Valley College (SVC) on a Friday afternoon and the campus is alive with a weekend vibe. There are markedly more people playing Frisbee, soccer, and strolling across campus compared with my last visit during the mid-week. There are also lots of people walking to and from the pool on campus at the athletic center passing through the patches of sunshine that are peeking through the grove of trees that line the quad. As I sit and soak in the campus, a cool refreshing breeze floats by carrying the quiet conversations and laughs of passersby. As I sat and soaked in the campus beneath the shade of an old tree, a cool breeze floated by carrying the quiet conversations and laughs of passersby. I noticed a young man who was tall and lanky with brownish blond hair, Ronaldinho. Smiling, he approached me with a long stride wearing a tie-dye t-shirt, Capri style pants, and cross trainer tennis shoes. He had an easygoing demeanor. Ronaldinho was calmly comfortable in his skin. As I came to find, comfort was an important construct that he sought out in his day-to-day existence.

Ronaldinho was a sophomore at SVC pursuing an interdisciplinary degree. He hailed from a large city in the Northwest United States and came from a family that I would consider to be upper middle class because his parents were both professionals in the medical field. He was an odd mix of timid yet vocal and this played out in our 90-minute conversation. He talked a lot but was guarded in the process almost checking and re-checking each word before and as he spoke them. It made for a very choppy analysis and I could tell during our time together that he was guarded and protecting some aspects of his story from public consumption. I never felt that he was playing games with me or the research process but was being very thoughtful and mindful of all the people he was representing and referring to.

Ronaldinho was the youngest of 5 and follows a brother, Peter, who recently graduated from SVC. Peter attended SVC with a different academic focus and varied social and involvement choices than Ronaldinho. Their parents were retired professionals from the medical field and believed, "helping people is part of their job. They wanted us to be aware that everybody should have the same opportunity and everybody deserves the same sort of treatments and benefits and everything like that." Ronaldinho focused on his mother's involvement during his academic career,

> my mom has been involved with the schools and tutored at a mainly minority middle school for a while so I mean she was definitely engaged in that a bit but not really much other than that. She never directly addressed issues unless it was really relevant to either their [his parents] or our [himself or his siblings] lives in terms of the schools that we would go to.

Though his mother was actively involved in his academic career and participated in ride sharing programs, Ronaldinho's stories showed it was based more on her children's academics than helping the greater community. Ronaldinho never really discussed his father's involvement in his academic career. He also did not recall his parents being active in social-political movements or organizations.

During our time together, we discussed and continued to dance around the issue of his family. He shared that as he grew more socially minded from his high school to college career; Ronaldinho developed differing views from his family as illustrated in this reflection on a recent holiday dinner conversation,

> We definitely don't agree on everything, you know? For example, Thanksgiving dinner we ended up having this big discussion about the police and prisons and all sorts of stuff like that and I realize it's really a fairly complex issue to try to deal with but I think that it has definitely influenced me to be a good person to everybody you come across and all there is to it…[adding] I will bring something up and they will, I think really listen and really try to understand things a bit better which is nice. They just won't like shut off or you know, they won't say like, 'oh, you are just…[makes a gesture that refers to being young or misguided]

Even though Ronaldinho said that his family made an effort to listen, I was left with the impression that the conversation presented in his Thanksgiving example was one of *let's agree to disagree.*

Ronaldinho's upbringing in a metropolitan city in the Northwest United States afforded him the opportunity to experience multiple moments of difference. He first shared a story about visiting a school campus with his mother when he was preparing to enter kindergarten that she "always mentions" to him. The elementary school had stratified academic levels: an advanced program with two lower levels filling out the three tiered hierarchy. Ronaldinho recalled that

> [my mom] didn't like it at all. Just how you walk to one classroom and it would be mainly white kids and you would go into another classroom and it would be mainly minority kids from around the area [inner city] and I am guessing that like that might be one of the first times that I realized that this whole social construct of race might be somehow be important. I might have just suddenly thought to myself, 'Wait this is kind of confusing. Like what is the link here?' Why, do all the kids in one class look like this [white] and why do all the kids in another class look like this [mix of minority backgrounds] you know, I couldn't really like put that whole confusion into words at all.

The Cultural Relations Program at Ronaldinho's high school added to his desire to explore issues of difference and armed him with the foundations of a lexicon to name and refer to issues. He described the program as an opportunity,

> where people would just come together like randomly. They weren't divided by their classes or something like that. It was just like a random group of people that were put together in a group and there would be a single facilitator that would go through and bring these sorts of questions around race, gender, socio-economic background and sexuality. We would go through and talk about these things that were something I really enjoyed.

Ronaldinho was eager to discuss issues of race and diversity that fueled his collegiate choice as well as micro choices while on campus such as where to live, what groups to join to, and what friendship circles to develop. When reflecting on his time as a member of the Cultural Relations Program, Ronaldinho said, "it was just a good opportunity to think about questions like privilege

and everything like that." Asking if they used terms like those, he added "yeah, I mean, that was one component. They had a little exercise where they say [a statement or ask a question and] you ah, step forward if you have ever [experienced that, for instance have you] been followed around through a store." This exercise is often referred to as the privilege walk. Ronaldinho was only able to participate in the program for one year because it was discontinued for reasons unbeknownst to him.

Throughout our conversation Ronaldinho referred to being comfortable and relating comfort to navigating more challenging situations. He recalled smaller cues in junior high school related to difference and diversity He first recounted language used on his campus,

> well I mean it I think it was definitely just more apparent because people would always be talking about the APP kids, the Spectrum kids and the Regular Program kids. You end up figuring out what that was the code words for…you would be able to better realize what was really going on in terms of the ethnic identities and stuff like that.

The reference to language on campus for Ronaldinho was juxtaposed by the placement of posters and flyers referring to and embracing diversity. He said,

> the classes I was taking as well had a big part in [my social justice awareness], I mean, there wasn't that much in the way of like racial issues that we really discussed, hardcore. It was always just like a general thing, you would see little posters in the hall that would say like 'diversity' and those sorts of things.

Some salient moments that stuck out in Ronaldinho's mind were seemingly mundane at times and not always directly related to the classroom environment. As we talked about his memories of things like posters in the hallway between classes, we came to see that his experiences in junior high school began to crystallize his broader view related to issues of race, difference, and diversity;

> I mean, definitely, it's all just been a developing situation. I am really a lot more comfortable with who I am now in college compared to high school just in terms of being aware of everything and you know, being more comfortable around people from a variety

> of different groups. I think that it has just been a slow and gradually constant development.

Ronaldinho's growing comfort and new level of awareness affected his college choice and subsequent on campus choices.

Prior to attending SVC, Ronaldinho submitted an application to live in the multicultural hall on campus and was accepted. It was challenging at first because "basically half the people in my hall already knew each other [because] a lot of them did this summer program right before your freshmen year that was an opportunity to introduce people different backgrounds to college life." The SVC summer program promoted academic success, community, and a culture of discussing and addressing issues of race and privilege. Ronaldinho entered the hall as a stranger but found,

> a bunch of the people [who] already knew each other they just really welcomed me. Even the first week, you know, every other night we would be sitting down in our rooms and talking about issues centering around race or gender or sexuality or we would have just a kicking dance party or something, it was so much fun.

As Ronaldinho's comfort level grew in the multicultural hall, he was able to leap right into discussions about privilege and difference inside and outside the confines of the Multicultural Hall. He reflected that he was,

> able to have these discussions with people and you know, being able to be open about feeling like, 'oh, I am white person and I can't talk about these things.' They just made me feel comfortable and just welcomed me and it has been like that ever since like just being able to talk to anybody about these sorts of things.

Ronaldinho noted that living at the multicultural hall has been an essential part of his life at SVC that supplemented his academic experiences.

Ronaldinho encountered situations in which he had to decide what was more important– exploring racial issues and possibly making a mistake or remaining in a familiar role as a silent supporter. The Multicultural Hall provided a safe environment with a regularly occurring cast

that fostered familiarity and comfort. When placed in public situations, away from the friendly confines of the hall Ronaldinho experienced "ignorant" comments and actions. It was in these public situations where he had to deal with the pull between his social ideals and their practical application. All this was layered with his being a white male amongst peers and people he respected and cared for but who did not necessarily share his views. The confines of the Multicultural Hall protected him from the power and (mis)use of words in the everyday environment.

In addition to his immersion in the Multicultural Hall, Ronaldinho was a member of several racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups. During his first-year, he sampled a variety of student groups in what I dubbed a buffet style selection process, trying a little of everything. I asked him how he arrived at his final membership choices and he provided a few criteria such as "groups I felt really something that I could really gain from it," "where we would actually talk about something important," "I would have a chance to hang around with people that I was friends with and get to meet new people," and "have some sort of comfortable atmosphere." When coupled with a rigorous course schedule and eking out some personal time, his criteria assisted in selecting groups that met his needs. His last criterion of a comfortable atmosphere is less tangible than the others and also translated to his choosing SVC. When referring to the relaxed climate Ronaldinho said the campus had a,

> comfortable atmosphere to it. It is kind of actually one of the things that drew me to SVC. It's the stuff that draws me to these clubs it is just, you know, a feeling, just an atmosphere. It is like something is going well. I feel comfortable…I can't really put my finger on it.

After clarifying his criteria he boiled them down to the following,

> it is mainly just hearing what different people have to say, really. you aren't going to be able get really the same sort of discussions going on, with how people feel about the

> kids in their classes and stuff like that and how they are treated if, somebody's asked like, 'oh, like how do you feel about this, you know, one black kid in the classroom?'

Ronaldinho explained that when listening to people and hearing what they have to say, it is important to provide a comfortable environment so points of view can be conveyed, and received.

Later in our conversation, Ronaldinho returned to comfortable conversations when referring to friendship groups outside of the Multicultural Hall. He compared the types of conversations he had with friends,

> Usually if I am just hanging out with a group of friends from somewhere else on campus there usually isn't that sort of [comfortable] atmosphere of directly talking about those sorts of issues [race, power, privilege, etc.] and understanding. There might be one person of color a group of friends that I am hanging around with but not the same level of discussion. It's just like the general liberal thing of talking about, 'hooray for Barack Obama' or something like that.

Outside the Multicultural Hall, Ronaldinho's conversations covered a wider range of topics, were less focused on social justice, and remained superficial and politically correct. However, when inside the Multicultural Hall, he stated conversations were focused more on issues of race, power, and privilege and reached a deeper level of exploration. Outside the Multicultural Hall, in the general campus environment and off campus Ronaldinho experienced situations and comments that caught him off guard because of their insensitive tone and ignorant meaning. Although he believed in social equality and supported social justice, he did not always speak up explaining, "sometimes I am not able to really come out and say something but it is something that I am working on."

Ronaldinho focused on "just trying to understand where somebody is coming from" and tried to follow that person's thought processes. He gave the following example,

> trying to understand where someone is coming from in terms of advocating for only heterosexual marriage and trying to understand where they are coming from in terms of

> their culture and everything like that…trying to think about [the issue] in different ways and understanding how their life has been and how they see things. Rather than just solely limiting it to how I see things and how I think that I would act in this situation or what I believe.

In these instances, Ronaldinho tried to place himself in that "person's shoes" to look at the topic being discussed. He felt that honesty was a large part of the process that must be shared by and between each person involved in the conversation. They may disagree about an issue but he stressed that "knowing where I am coming from [is important] in order to understand the difference between my perspective and another person's perspective." This has led him to approach conversations in a more open way in which everyone can express their thoughts and opinions while not being criticized. He strives for the conversations to become explorations of ideas with someone that can possibly change their perspective from being closed to open.

Ronaldinho and I talked about how he felt among white peers. He described the few white males who lived in the Multicultural Hall and how they shared the same social justice orientations even though they had different backgrounds, tastes in music, and interests. When thinking about other white males across campus Ronaldinho offered,

> it is always interesting looking at other white males around campus who are involved in these sorts of issues and trying to really figure out how committed they were to these sorts of things. [He found himself trying] not to be judgmental immediately thinking like, 'oh, you are just another white person.'

Ronaldinho spoke highly of a relationship he developed with a white female friend, Shelly, who was a "really great resource for me in terms of being able to talk to her comfortably." Shelly was a sounding board for issues related to race and power dynamics. She gave Ronaldinho counter viewpoints and a different gendered perspective than his male counterparts could provide. He explained,

> it is always really eye opening, the kind of conversations that I have had with her because she is also involved in like the [white student group on campus] and [her background and major] so she is constantly thinking about those sorts of things.

When he would pose a question about whiteness or racism on campus Shelly offered,

> something completely opposite it is where she is coming from being a woman and the experiences that she has had she might feel more like whiteness is like, like there is sexual repression there, too.

Their friendship was an important part of his collegiate experience and allowed him to better develop his thoughts about issues of whiteness and racism.

Outside of his racially minded support group, Ronaldinho had to navigate friends and peers who "are kind of ignorant of racial issues and some people just kind of like ah, put that on the back burner." He referred to his need to be cognizant of the level of distrust he had for ignorant white peers who were not involved with racial dialogues and activism across campus. He expressed a persistent effort to keep in mind every person's individual circumstances and experiences. When talking with these people about race, he took a different approach focused on "being able to relate something that they are talking about relating gender issues" for example. By getting them to talk about something that is important to them such as gender issues, Ronaldinho overlays race on their conversation allowing peers to ease into a racial discussion that they might otherwise avoid. "I can bring that over to racial issues to try to get multiple perspectives on things. Multiple ways of thinking about these sorts of issues." He talked about apathy that was present in the majority of his white peers, which he attributed to busy collegiate schedules coupled with their pre-college experiences. As whites who believe in social justice, we discussed the struggle of balancing a social life and being cognizant of not marginalizing issues and beliefs that are important to one's self. I assured him that as white people and particularly as

white males, this struggle never gets completely resolved nor should it ever become a thing that is not thought about because that is when systemic whiteness takes root again.

CHAPTER 6

FELIX

As I walk through the Sunshine Valley campus the climate is vastly different compared to my previous visits. 51 degrees, downpours, wind, fog, mist…am I still in the southwest? I walked through the misty drizzle on a dreary Friday to the library for my 3rd interview. The campus was still bustling with foot traffic, students flowing to and from classes. I entered the library and promptly signed in, having become accustomed to campus procedures. The student worker was somewhat surprised that a visitor actually stopped by the library *and* signed in.

The library entrance was alive with the chatter of people talking, six in a circle, and the library student worker chatted with someone at the counter. The group discussed their classes and made fun of learning objectives and other facets of their classes; as they were concluding, they headed out in the gloom. Once they left the lobby area, it plunged back into the customary realms of library silence. The buzz of the air circulating, footsteps in the ladder well, empty metal carts being pushed, and the rustling of pant legs brushing against one another echo out in every direction.

I settle into a green overstuffed leather chair that is one of six in a circle just off to the left of the library entryway, which has become part of my pre-interview routine. I used this time to think about communications with Felix and how our interview might play out. Felix entered the library, looked around the entryway through dark, square framed glasses and walked towards me as I stood to greet him. He wore stylish clothes and had a put together look that matched his cool and confident personae.

Felix comes from the western United States and took an interesting pathway through the educational system. He attended a private kindergarten through ninth grade school based on an

international model. Upon graduation he no longer wanted to continue in private school, wanting a more diverse environment. Felix started tenth grade at a large public, metropolitan high school, Crossroads High School where he became very involved in debate, which heavily influenced his worldview and ultimately led him to Sunshine Valley College. Felix was a sophomore who majored in a Social Science with a minor in Arts & Humanities. He was very politically active and had grown passionate about issues of diversity, equity, and social justice.

The international, progressive Maple Leaf Elementary School he attended was comprised of children from wealthy families and was fairly homogenous, according to Felix who said, "the school itself was almost entirely white and mostly Jewish". Felix recalled the climate of the school, including a specific group called Connections, "we had a lot of strange tensions within the school. We had this group called Connections which was meant to be a diversity oriented group trying to inform people on that level [but] it wasn't a particularly well structured group." When discussing why he joined Connections, Felix told me, "I honestly don't remember. I mean I wasn't super socially aware and I had some friends who were in it." On top of not being well structured, there were some additional tensions associated with the teachers who moderated the group. He described one of the teachers, Erica, as a "fairly radical black teacher" because of her teaching style and approach to the curriculum. The school had a set curriculum and Erica,

> didn't quite abide by [the curriculum] and designed it in kind of, she erred in favor of, she taught us a lot of (chuckles) um, Malcolm X. She had us read Malcolm X's biography and had us do an extensive paper on Martin Luther King, Jr. She was meant to be teaching us about the Harlem Renaissance and we did get a little of that but I think like she, I think she made a lot of teachers or parents kind of uncomfortable...

The other teacher Felix mentioned during his elementary school reflection was Christopher, the school diversity coordinator who was also involved with Connections. Felix described him as a "gay black guy" who was harassed quite a bit. "[Erica and Christopher] ended up getting a lot of

hate mail, it was sort of ambiguous but you know, explicitly racist homophobic, hate mail", which Felix thought could have originated from "[white] students probably [their] parents actually but [the threats] could have been [made by] students as well." The buildup of harassment and negative feelings towards both teachers lead Erica to leave the campus. Felix described the situation,

> they were friends and kind of did stuff with the Connections group. [Erica] didn't really get along with a lot of teachers and she was a sort of combative kind of character. So I think without knowing the exact details of what the politics within the administration machine were, they ended up (makes quotations with his fingers) "retiring" her to another school. The implication there being that [Erica] was pushed out [of the school] or at least that is what the students thought.

Christopher stayed on campus for a time after Felix moved on to high school and he does not know if the teacher remained a permanent fixture on campus.

Felix did not readily divulge information about his family and skillfully navigated around the topic. He did not make mention of siblings or what his parents did professionally. Looking back over our conversation I found only one reference made to his parents that was related to their support of his transition from private to public school,

> I mean my parents were like fine with, I mean, they are both, you know, smart like I mean I wasn't but I mean they are both good, you know, sort of liberal people so they were, I mean, they were cool with the idea of me kind of getting out [of private school].

As Felix ended his K9 tenure at Maple Leaf Elementary he realized that he wanted to experience new settings, people, and cultures. He said, "[the desire to experience diversity] appealed to my sense of wanting to get *more* you know, *see* in that sense to see what the other campus was like and get more perspective on it." This led him to attend Crossroads High School. "I chose to go there because it wasn't a small private school and had a lot of good extracurricular stuff." While recalling issues of difference on campus, Felix discussed two of his friends,

> I had a couple black friends who were from more privileged backgrounds. They did debate or speech, actually respectively one did speech and one did debate…so there were moments where kids would be joking around and be like, 'ah, you are not really black. You're, you are white because you are wearing, you know, like, kind of preppy clothes and like you are doing this and you are well spoken.' So I mean moments like that where it is suddenly because they are you know, smart and together and like dress a certain way…So those would always kind of be a pretty stark reminder of ah, [under his breath] difference I guess.

Felix reflected that on a daily basis he faced issues of difference because of the campus environment,

> The vast majority of the school was black, Latino and then there was this small minority well not the majority of the school was you know, white or was seen as white and in most of the X and AP classes you mostly just saw white kids.

Overall, it appeared that attending Crossroads High School contributed to Felix's change in perspective due to his membership in student groups and life experiences.

Although, Crossroads High School was part of a "fairly bad public school system in general", it had a faculty that Felix considered to be "fairly high caliber teachers." The teacher quality attracted students from various private schools in the area as well as students who transferred there as a normal next step in their public educational career. Felix described Crossroads High School this way,

> it attracted a lot of kids who went to little private schools and some of the magnet schools as well as the low end, non-normative junior highs. There was a fairly exclusive, I mean it's kind of trite to say that two [private] schools [make up] maybe one fourth of the school and are white [who] took AP classes and were kind of, you know, privileged on that level and then there is everyone else and there wasn't exactly any hostility. Those relationships there were pretty benign so it didn't seem like there was tension between [majority and minority] groups like that but um, there, I mean, it was, it was just something that was there.

Felix noted the socio-economic advantages that the privately schooled white students possessed who came from privileged families, as he did, and chose to attend Crossroads High School. As high school went along, Felix became "more cynical about [issues of diversity] because a lot of

like privileged white kids that go there and it kind of, it becomes a tourist kind of thing, by the end of high school I was not particularly fond of." As I listened to Felix recount his high school experiences, talking about campus environment and climate, he began to mention several exchanges between high school staff and minority students that he had heard about. "There were a number of incidents involving advisors who would discourage black students from taking advanced classes and stuff like that and so, you know, some kind of fishy stuff going on."

Felix began to be conscious of diversity, power, and privilege because of his involvement in the debate club. He emphasized, "I did debate which probably informed me and gave me a pretty critical lens and that was actually, in terms of my academic and intellectual development it was probably the biggest thing, really." Debate "certainly radically helped change the way that I looked at things." Politically, Felix also began to get involved in city and state politics "doing a lot of stuff with progressive politics." Entering the debate world exposed Felix to more than just the "nitty gritty little policy details". He learned "Marxist theory and like stuff like that so there is a lot of kind of like higher level theory." All of these experiences and knowledge bases coalesced for Felix into awareness about his racial and socio-economic privileges. Felix explained the culture and climate of the debate community,

> Debate tends to still have a more privileged bend to it because the structure of debate is pretty alienating. It is not the way you would normally have a formal debate with someone; it's incredibly fast like blindingly fast in terms of speed so you normally don't really understand it if you were not trained in it.

Along with the speedy format, which can isolate outsiders, debate participants generally are a part of debate camps, which cost money, which can promote an "exclusionary culture within it."

Felix described debate teams from other schools across the country, specifically some teams comprised of minority students who debated in ways that critiqued the system of privilege and exclusion. "Their debates were like performance, kind of critiques of that white culture of

debate…drawing on Freire" and similar theorists' work. He described how some of these teams with primarily minority students began to win debates based on their debate and presentation skills resulting in backlash from the majority white debate teams,

> a couple of really talented inner city schools that had developed really good speech programs and created a lot of controversy within the speech community. [As other primarily white debate teams] were losing to them they were like, 'ah, this is just like these kind of black-sploitation performances' but in reality they were just really good speeches that tended to draw on themes that were pulled out of certain communities.

Along with debate, Felix was a member of the high school choir. The choir "was one of the few actual places in high school where there was actual interaction between gender, race."

When Felix transitioned to Sunshine Valley College, he ventured farther West away from home as well as from a large, public high school back into the small, private educational environment. He told me,

> [Sunshine Valley College] is cool in a lot of ways. It does have a significantly more diverse population than a lot of other similarly situated liberal arts schools but at the same time I think that the dynamics which I saw at work in high school are still sort of here.

Felix felt that the majority of white students did not support issues of diversity but knew enough of the jargon to get by in diversity trainings and content sections of courses. He added that white students, "might understand the spark notes you know, played it cool like 'Oh, we get it. Whatever, race is socially constructed blah, blah, blah.' But like not really actually engaging that."

Felix considered himself different from the general white population on campus because of his racial awareness and because the "vocabulary I can deploy in talking about that difference is probably more sophisticated." As he thought about the differences between his high school and college campuses, he noted,

> my sense of it is that part of the thing that is going on in high school is because there weren't people pushing back in either direction from either group of people [minority and

> majority]. There was a very passive and kind of benign schism between the privileged and the unprivileged. At Sunshine Valley College amongst minority students I think that they're more radicalized in way, in a good way, in my mind but in a way that means there is more of a tendency towards critique, I think for white kids here they tend to be more reactionary.

He also surmised that other white students were not generally exposed to such discussions, leaving them unable to adequately and comfortably discuss such issues,

> I don't really remember a lot of us really talking about difference and occasionally we would come off and like say like stupid sort of racist shit like, 'oh, make sure to, you know, not step on any black girls shoes' and you know, stuff like that but there weren't ever any really serious discussions about the other dialogue and stuff like that…there is more tension there, just because, I think that white people don't like being told that they do bad shit and that they're benefiting from the system.

As a member of the white community and aware of issues of difference, Felix felt conflicted because he maintained relationships with racially ignorant white students yet, considered himself a racial justice activist who had meaningful friendships with racial/ethnic minority students.

Referring to his friends who were not racial justice advocates, Felix said, "[my friends] still have a lot of good characteristics even if they may have been built into a certain mindset which works towards maintaining their white privilege." Felix and his white friends did not talk about social justice issues because they knew about his involvement with the campus white student organization and beliefs about issues of diversity and equity. Reflecting back on those conversations, Felix said, "I will confront people in general if that happens but at the same time, it is like that is part of what is weird about it, it is something that we generally do not talk about." Although Felix wanted to be active and promote awareness amongst his white friends, he felt conflicted because he feared he would end up alienating them. He strove to balance the fight against racism while keeping his white friends, who do not believe the same things as he does,

> I will occasionally confront people so it became a topic that is sort of limited but at the same time like people you know occasionally say little benign stupid remarks and I don't

> want to antagonize my friends…I have never really been able to figure out how to manage it exactly.

The racial campus dynamic and subsequent discussions revolved around Henry Hall, the only multicultural hall on campus. "[Henry Hall] is where, I don't know the exact numbers but my sense is, I am nearly certain that is where the vast majority of [racial/ethnic minority] students at Sunshine Valley College live." Acknowledging that he had friends who lived in Henry Hall and that it was a "cool" place to hang out, Felix felt the dorm structure of the campus created multiple silos. These silos served as a hindrance to making friends outside of a particular hall,

> because of the [dorm system at Sunshine Valley] the people I lived around my freshman year were mostly white people and so most of the close friends that I had developed during that time tended to be white and I did not go to [the campus summer multicultural program] because I really was not aware of it. So the organic development of my social circle most my friends are [white] but at the same time I have a lot, you know, a fair amount of friends are not white and are not necessarily from those circles.

It occurred to Felix that his friendship circles on campus developed in response to his environment. Armed with theory, vocabulary, and diverse friendships, Felix still found,

> It is a weird thing to navigate because even amongst a lot of my good friends you know, they still have, I mean, they sort of know me (he laughs) my tendency to like blow up when [topics of race and privilege] comes up so it is generally something that is avoided (chuckles).

Felix's comment is interesting because later he notes being conflicted about how to talk about these issues and ultimately decides to not say anything because he does not want to lose his friends, no matter what their views on race are.

As we talked about his social circles and campus involvement, we discussed the formation of the white student group and Felix's participation in it. The purpose of this group was to foster anti-racist discussion among white students while trying to enact some sort of

presence for change. The initial group consisted of a handful of white students interested in issues of race and social justice. In response to the group's formation, a college panel composed of racial/ethnic minority student group leaders, faculty, and staff was created in order to talk about campus impact the group might have. There was an optimistic consensus that the group,

> was a very kind of positive thing, the idea being to generate the kind of discourse about race but also just helping enable white students to confront white privilege and how it is that they help contribute to racism in a way that is healthy.

Although, the campus review panel thought that it was a positive thing, the group encountered opposition and controversy on campus. The opposition stemmed from the broader idea "that white people are garnering the benefits from the dominating system or a system which privileges one group and oppresses another." In such a system, individuals question how white people would be able to step away from such privilege. The response was that these white students "should bear unique responsibility for [the] dismantlement [of that systemic oppression]." This task was compounded by the perceived existence of a "kind of widespread ignorance amongst white students within the campus with regards to race, if not an unwillingness to confront it or actually deal with it."

The first meeting of the white student group, widely attended by a racially diverse group of students, focused on addressing the major critique of the editorial piece and resulted in the word white being put in quotations. Once that meeting concluded and the publicity around the group's formation faded, so did attendance. Felix felt, "basically the fire got burnt out fairly quickly um, so membership kind of fell off."

Throughout the brief life of the group, it encountered hurdles to becoming a solidified campus group with a stable membership base. Initial membership consisted of five people who met bi-weekly at lunch and discussed various issues related to race. Felix poignantly notes, "it is

hard because it is one of those things where we are the only sort of movement where you have to try to bring people in by telling them how bad they are." In addition to skepticism and controversy from the campus community, the group faced an uncertain future because of interpersonal dynamics amongst founding members of the group. The white student group had a small operating budget coupled with inconsistent leadership posing serious obstacles to its growth. Felix remembered that the group attempted to co-sponsor an event with an ex-Neo Nazi speaker because of its limited budget. The speaker was already scheduled to present for another group and "we were just kind of tagging along on their coat tails trying to like get some people that way."

Felix described the group's leadership dynamics as "kind of a struggling endeavor. There were a lot of differences between and within the people who were on the E-Board. There were tensions there and it wasn't like the greatest chemistry." Those dynamics led Felix to believe that the group was losing focus and diluting any influence it had on campus. "It's basically been an ongoing effort to try to bring people in. It has just been hard. We ended up taking a break for this semester because two the E-Board people are gone [on study abroad]. We will see what happens." At the time this research was completed, the white student group was not active since the hiatus.

In addition to being a member of the white student group, Felix was a member of the Black Student Alliance (BSA) and attended with his friend "as gesture of solidarity" towards his African American peers. Felix referred to the BSA's climate, as "sort of weird and there was a little anxiety." He noted the anxiety intensified after the joint meeting was held between the BSA and the white student group; "it was just like a really intense thing." The joint meeting was laden

with misunderstandings and miscommunication, which negatively affected Felix and some other participants.

One of several issues exposed during the joint meeting was safe space on campus for racial/ethnic minority students. The intense feelings and comments about issues of space on campus shared at the joint meeting made Felix hyper sensitive. He became uncomfortable and eventually stopped attending BSA meetings. Felix believed,

> if even a few people there are uncomfortable with [my attending a meeting] that I really [did not] want to be putting them in that position or if I was even in position to put them in that position. Frankly, I kind of understand that point of view and to me it makes sense to have…their own space.

Later in our conversation Felix returned to his thoughts on being a member of the BSA, "I am not going to lie, I did feel sort of, out of my element a little bit. I felt like I was imposing myself or like I didn't quite belong there." He said he was one of a handful of white students present at the BSA meetings. Although he stressed that white students were welcomed and African American students seated nearby treated him well, he still felt like he was imposing and that he "didn't really necessarily belong there." Even with BSA leadership being overtly supportive of white student attendance, Felix vaguely recalled, "there being a couple people who kind of had these sort of questioning looks on their faces." Compared to his experiences in other student groups on campus Felix told me that,

> [the other groups were] a lot more ambiguous honestly because most other groups I am involved with are intellectual things where I can be sparry with and be able to like push people around with, not that I am like super like pushy person, but like could be more gamey sort of things and there is more comfort there with that [for me]. [Having] that option there, yeah, so more sense of security whereas with this [BSA meeting] that [comfort level/sense of security] wasn't there. So I mean my main instinct was like kind of like I wanted to show like solidarity and show that you know, for the black struggle against white domination and [show] I am a part of like want to be a part of that.

Felix's internal conflict of how to reconcile being uncomfortable as a white person, BSA member, and wanting to show solidarity to his racial/ethnic minority peers resulted in his withdrawal from the group. He still strived to be a supportive member of the campus community although not as a sustained member of the BSA. "One of my main things [was that] I didn't want to take up a lot of space and be kind of…I don't know, it was sort of, I was kind of conflicted on that front I guess."

As we revisited these experiences, I asked about his personal development and growth since these events lead to his withdrawal. Felix believed his activity on campus with issues of diversity and social justice showed that his interest and dedication were real and "certainly not just like a kind of superficial niche you know, show that I am like, I am down wit it [sic]." Felix shared how his whiteness was a barrier to truly understanding a racial/ethnic minority experience,

> the idea that I could you know, empathize or really understand what [racial/ethnic minority students] go through, the way in which they struggle is foolish and naïve and so I think that to even pretend that I could actually be a part of the group on the inside.

Felix was unsure how he would feel returning to the group noting, "I would like to think that is how I feel [more comfortable] when I get there but I mean, I don't know." In particular, I asked if he would return as a sustained member of BSA now that he is more secure in his whiteness, "I just feel in terms of, at least on a strategic level, I think I can do more working outside the group and but also like just like on a personal comfort level I am probably better on the outside.". Although, he built some social capital within the racial/ethnic minority student groups, Felix said, "I don't know that I would do this [return as a member of BSA], do it again."

CHAPTER 7

SHILO

I find myself in East Lansing, Michigan amidst 5 to 8 inches of snow and blustery winds, which make me think fondly of the cool and rainy winter of the West Coast. I was introduced to Shilo via a third party whom I contacted looking for participants. Shilo was a 20 year old, third year student at Sunshine Valley College (SVC) majoring in an interdisciplinary program with social justice themes. She was interested in an array of topics and was always involved in creative writing, which provided a strong basis for her involvement in racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups. At the time of our interview, she was studying writing styles at a university in a major metropolitan city on the East Coast for a semester. Interviewing Shilo over the phone was interesting because I was not able to check my mental image of her and read physical cues during our time together.

Shilo grew up in the northeastern United States, in an upper middle class suburban community about 45 minutes from a large metropolitan East Coast city. Shilo's parents were married and still together at the time of the interview. This was important for Shilo's story because, "almost [all] of the close friendships that I developed, had divorced families. I don't know if that was just a coincidence or what? But it was like my family was the one that had the parents that were together." She talked about friends whose parents were divorced or separated and how she was chastised because she had "the perfect family like the one that the parents are together." She described her parents as cool, approachable, and fun. They both hailed from the mid-Atlantic Coast and grew up Catholic, attending church every Sunday. Her father worked in engineering and her mother was a technical writer. "They both have these kind of electronic jobs…it is not really my thing."

Shilo also had two sisters, one older and one younger. Commenting about her place in the family she said, “I am like the weird like middle child.” Her younger sister, Susan, was 17 and a high school senior preparing to enter college. Her other sister, Gayle, was 18 months older than Shilo and a senior at an East Coast university majoring in Pre-Med. Shilo told me about how different she was from Gayle who always had identified Medicine as her professional goal. Shilo found her sister’s focus impressive contrasting her own academic mentality, as “I do not know what I am doing.” Shilo and Gayle were also different with respect to their focus on issues of race and privilege, which led Shilo to be involved with r/e ms groups and shaped her social interactions throughout her life. Shilo elaborated,

> I do not think my older sister understands completely like my complicated relationship to race because I think that like it never, it just was not a thing for [her] and I think it is hard to like talk to somebody that grew up in [our hometown] and [issues of race] just was not a thing for them, you know? Because it was like such a thing for me.

Shilo thought about this for a moment and could not come up with a reason for her observation since the sisters shared several similar experiences that Shilo felt were very salient to issues of race, privilege, and power. Shilo accepted that she “cannot really explain why…it did not hit her like it hit me.” We talked about the difference between Gayle and Shilo’s perspective about race and how people experience events differently given the point they are at in their life.

Before we talked about her K-12 experiences, Shilo paused for a moment and said, “I haven’t ever really reflected on these time periods so it’s like just all coming together now…” In second grade, Shilo befriended Jen, with whom she is a still best friend today. In her hometown there were mainly single-family homes but Jen and her parents lived above a tailor shop in an apartment. This stuck out to Shilo because her peers generally all lived in houses like hers. When she began to stay over at Jen’s house, Shilo noticed a difference in cultural values and parental styles. She said that Jen’s “parent’s parenting style and just everything about what happened

when I was over her house and what happened when we were at my house was totally different…and I loved it. I loved being at her house." Her experiences with Jen's family were juxtaposed to her familial environment, which was more structured and grounded in American suburban traditions.

We transitioned from elementary to middle school experiences where salient moments with difference began to emerge. Shilo prefaced her reflection by saying that she was,

> never really a popular kid but I was always kind of on the cusp…I think like I kind of wanted to be a popular girl…but I didn't have it in me. I think I was a little bit too like *weird*. I definitely didn't have like the right like clothes or like attitude.

Shilo realized that throughout her life, experiences with difference were tied to popularity and the friendship circles associated with her level of popularity.

During middle school, Shilo attended a free summer writing camp held on a local university campus that brought children together with varying levels of writing proficiency from different communities. Shilo referred to middle school as a time when race became salient, "a lot changed for me when I started doing this summer camp…I don't think it impacted me particularly heavily until the summer going into eighth grade." Up to this point in her life, Shilo felt the camp "was probably the most, racially, socioeconomically, academically diverse group of students that I had ever been immersed in." She expressed love for the camp several times and how much those summers meant to her. The writing camp was a place where she was a popular kid compared to her in-school personae, saying, "[I] wasn't quite like a cool kid." The camp environment also allowed attendees to become a pseudo family. Shilo told me how they called each other as brother and sister and how the camp staff was referred to as aunts and uncles. It provided a feeling of interconnectedness that she did not feel at school. She added that most of her camp family was primarily black and that she still is friends with most of the people in that

family. Comparatively, experience at another camp was neither as intense nor meaningful for her because it lacked the diversity that she loved at the writing camp.

> This sleep away camp for like two weeks and there were like no black kids, which was like something that I definitely noticed. I don't even know if I would have noticed that if I hadn't just been at the [writing camp]. I just had this like terrible time at sleep away camp and I had like pictures that I had developed from this disposable camera of [writing camp] and I just looked at them all the time and [thought] how like great my camp was and I had this like nostalgia because I knew I wasn't going back there and I knew I wasn't going to have, when I went back to school even, I wasn't going to have like the type of community.

Shilo missed the intensity and connection of her writing camp friendships in her day-to-day routine and realized this "was disturbing for me."

The city in which Shilo grew up was outside a major metropolitan area and as a result, used a bussing program to bring children in from the city to attend surrounding suburban schools. Shilo described how the bussing program (BUSPRO) created issues around socio-economic status (SES) and race when low SES African American students were sent into low SES white neighborhoods and tensions ensued. Because of the long commute, the [BUSPRO] students had host families with whom they stayed the night if a field trip or special program was scheduled early the next morning. Shilo's family was a host family for a BUSPRO student, which she recounted was, "my first experience with difference."

As Shilo entered eighth grade, the experience at writing camp continued to influence her. She spoke about completely altering her friendship circles and the people she hung out with at school. She started to associate with the BUSPRO students, making it clear that, "it wasn't like a total inclusion. I wouldn't say that I was like part of their community." She became close friends with several of the BUSPRO students as well as other students who "didn't quite fit into like the… [campus] mold." Around the same time, Shilo started to date a BUSPRO student named

Keith, which was a point of contention with her African American female peers because there were a limited number of African American males on campus.

High school for Shilo was wrought with change, one of the biggest of which was that her best friend Jen moved in with her, and Shilo's parents became Jen's legal guardians. The move was a result of a second divorce for Jen's mother, who then needed to return to Thailand to re-center herself. Fitting in was no longer Shilo's ambition. "I was changed; I didn't want to be in the popular group anymore." With her new social ambitions, she became angry about her position in life and disagreed with the social and financial status of her community. Shilo began to get anxious about what she was missing by not growing up during her "formative years" in another more diverse place and was convinced that her hometown "wasn't going to shape me right. You know? It wasn't going to shape me into like the person that I needed to be." The affluence of her hometown started to "turn her off" and she found it uninteresting such that she wanted to move away from this town.

In addition to rejecting all things that represented affluence and her hometown, Shilo cast off academics. "Anything that had to do with me being smart I rejected. I just didn't want anyone to know that I had intelligence. I thought that it wasn't cool." So she began to surround herself with a friendship circle that did not value or support academic achievement; acceptance came from things other than being intellectual. She began to date a white guy named Steve in the next town who was raised in a lower SES area and in a single parent home. She spent as much time with Steve as possible to avoid all the things that she disliked about her hometown. With Steve, Shilo would party, drink, and smoke all of which her family disapproved. Shilo reflected on her turning point in high school,

> I had like a turning point in high school. I dated a [white] guy [Brian] from [my hometown]. It is weird how all these stories are like in the context of like boys, but I

> guess that is…where I was at. It kind of reflects where I was at accurately which I never thought of before.

Dating Brian was important because his home life mirrored her own and it was a return of sorts to the culture of her hometown. Around this time, Shilo returned to academic and intellectual endeavors, and reached a point in her life where she,

> opened up in a lot of ways. I finally said [to myself], 'okay, um, I can learn about things that I want to learn about and I don't have to be embarrassed about it. That was kind of like a big self turning point and I learned how to meditate in the same style like my parents did. I was trying to explore new [things], it felt like a really big turning point in terms of not having to deny certain aspects of myself like I'd say mainly academic type stuff and it felt good.

The transition between cultures and friendship groups played out for Shilo in her home as well living with Jen as a member of the family, and then later at SVC. Shilo noted the differences in personal space with Jen sharing,

> Jen and I shared a room and that was a little like (laughs to herself), there was a lot of *difference* there in terms of like living style. She was very meticulous and particular about people touching her stuff and I was the opposite.

Shilo's sibling dynamics were very different; she and her siblings traded clothes freely and differences with Jen led to some tensions including college choice. The tension was internal for Shilo as she faced her own privilege compared to someone she considered a sister. Shilo told me about how she felt when she and Jen applied to colleges and the reality of their SES status came into focus,

> Jen and I obviously had very different socioeconomic experiences but it never really hit home and the class thing never really hit home because we went to the same school always. We basically…we just had a lot of shared experiences. For the first time I really felt the weight of our class differences in college admissions when she couldn't go to the school that she really wanted to go to because they didn't give her a good enough package and like the amount of financial aid…she basically was going to require like a full ride from where ever she went.

Comparatively, Shilo could go to any school where she was accepted because of the financial assistance her parents were able to provide. She noted somberly, “Mine came down to [two universities] and I could go to either one. It was just merely a decision of which one I desired more.” She reflected that she did not even have a moment to celebrate getting into schools of her choice because “it just kind of felt like shit…it felt like I was the spoiled one and it was kind of like a new, a new feeling.”

As a result of proximity to Jen and her financial situation, Shilo became more aware of her privilege and bothered by it; her sense of self was heightened. “I am a privileged person. That is part of my sense of self. I am grateful for these things but I would say that it is more; it is way more complicated than that it doesn’t feel like awesome.” As we talked more about becoming cognizant of privilege, she reflected that her middle school and early high school experiences were “more about me trying to fit in and like I guess pretend that I had some lack of privilege like some non-equal access to something.”

At SVC, Shilo continued the academic pursuits she rediscovered at the end of high school; her interdisciplinary major allowed her to develop a vocabulary and way of understanding her experiences through lenses of race and gender. “I started learning about stuff I had experienced and like had no words for, I started realizing there are whole schools of thought devoted to like these dynamics and investigating the experiences that I had had.” The transition from personal to academic and the melding of the two ways of knowing was a new process for Shilo. She reflected on her experiences saying,

> race had been something that was kind of a social investigation for me purely. My experiences at camp and then coming back into a pretty white environment [with] a new perspective on race, wondering where I fit into all of it. But then it started becoming something that I was writing papers on and I was attending lectures about.

Incorporating an awareness of her privilege and growing vocabulary played out within her social circles, as well. During her first-year, Shilo lived in a primarily white dormitory and so by default, her initial friendship circle was white. Although she felt the white students were good friends, she did not feel completely connected to them or that they shared the same experiences and interests that she had,

> Race was just more relevant thing for me. It was not on their radar like it was on my radar I guess. I do not really know how to describe it, but I did kind of feel the sense that like kind of dissatisfaction with my friend group often times.

The more Shilo learned about issues of race and gender, the more dissatisfied she became with the lack of shared interest in her group of friends.

Looking for more support and common interests, Shilo applied for a position at the campus intercultural center her second-year at SVC. Being a part of the center "opened up the whole community to me, like the whole community of color at SVC." She talked about the peer interview process and skepticism she faced because she "was not a face that was like familiar. I did not live in the multi-cultural hall. They kind of like were confused. Like why do you want this job?" Shilo ended up getting one of five positions awarded each year. She dubbed her second-year on campus "a big transformation" socially. She lost some friends and said that her white "friend group basically disintegrated." She assisted in programming and cultural events for which she had to be present and by default began to form close relationships with peers at the center and in communities of color. Over time, she built rapport and "what starts off as business like turns into friendships."

Some of Shilo's business relationships blossomed into great friendships and others introduced her to cynics and antagonists. While working at the center, Shilo met Leelah who was a person with credibility in the campus African American community. Shilo and Leelah bonded

while at a retreat and became best friends. Along with a best friend, Shilo gained a staunch supporter about whom she said, "[Leelah] always like had my back which made it easier to be like seamlessly integrated in the community." Shilo faced resistance and skepticism from older students because they did not know her. She acknowledged that her intentions for working at the cultural center were not clear to the campus African American community, adding that this move "wasn't reflective of my friend group my freshman year." The doubt she felt from peers led to feeling ignored and brushed aside. Shilo understood this and was able to deal with the skeptics' doubt but did not understand why some individuals verbally attacked and harassed her. For example, Dave was an outspoken member of the African American campus community, who "speaks his mind to everyone and he is really controversial and he loves it that way." Dave confronted her in social and academic settings never giving Shilo the opportunity to share who she was or wanting to get to know her.

Along with the antagonists, Shilo realized that she would not be able to do the kind of programming that she wanted. She explained, "most people wanted to put on a program that was specific to their ethnic group. And when it came down to me it was always like, *Oh why don't you like plan this section on like white privilege*." Other cultural programs focused on the pride of being a part of the featured racial/ethnic minority group while her programming was focused on what was inherently wrong with whiteness. Although important and necessary, constantly having to execute programs about whiteness became tiresome for her.

From talking about her programmatic experiences, we transitioned to student group membership. When asked what student groups she belonged to, Shilo replied, "Not really any to be honest with you." This was at first surprising, but she talked about several groups she participated in without being an official member. For example, while hanging out with friends,

she would be casually invited to attend Black Student Alliance (BSA) meetings and did so for a couple meetings. The goal of BSA for that year was to increase participation of non-black students at meetings. Shilo reflected, "and so there was like tons of like new white faces that were there that were like not really involved within the community at all…cause SVC is so small you know the people that are into the things you're into." She talked about a joint meeting that went awry where the BSA met with a white anti-racism student group along with a slew of other white students. During this meeting, Shilo commented,

> there is a point at which there could be too many white students at a BSA meeting, say you have a BSA meeting with like two black students and like 75 white students. At what point does it cease to [meet] the purposes of meeting the needs of black students?

After that experience, Shilo stopped attending the BSA meetings.

Shilo paused, then said, "Oh yeah you know what else I forgot about was that I was on black graduation committee." Shilo described it as a "special additional ceremony to commemorate or bring attention to the fact that minority groups graduate from college in under represented numbers." The committee was student run and independently funded. Shilo became a member of the committee because her friend Leelah was the chair; she also had several close black friends who were graduating,

> So it felt right to be on the committee. It didn't feel like I was just kind of like – it wasn't like a random act of kindness. It felt personal. It's like I want [my friends] to know, I know how hard they've worked…I just I want to see them have a nice ceremony.

Her involvement centered on community support and personal relationships.

Being on another campus for nearly a semester at the time of the interview and living outside of her normal confines, Shilo had opportunity to reflect on the SVC campus environment and climate. "It's just funny to me looking back because I'm not there anymore. SVC is a really hyper segregated environment." We talked about on what this environment was based and how

that played out for various members of the campus community. Shilo noted that the campus was a "white space" and that small communities or groups of minority students form because "the whole institution is white." The places that minority students congregate were easily identified because the white majority dominates the campus context. Tensions continually arose when Shilo tried to have racial/ethnic minority friends get together with her white friends due to her white friends' lack of racial awareness and ignorance to issues of social justice.

Shilo's internal examination of what whiteness meant in relation to her outward interactions resulted in the following description,

> I think like I do feel at odds with like a larger, if you could even say like a white community. I do feel at odds with a white community. I'm like uncomfortable. Annoyed sometimes. Irritated. I have felt myself like feel I guess extreme irritation bordering on like hate. But you know I'm trying to move beyond that. But take each person like for what they are rather than just like be ticked off by the way they speak.

Shilo explained that she was white and that it "doesn't make any sense to, to hate white people" even though they do things that "piss her off." Her education helped her see things from a new vantage point, seeing what whiteness means in our societal context and understanding "how pale people have acted on this planet." Shilo found it hard "to feel love for white people" because of the violence perpetrated by whites on communities of color. She began to make distinctions about the types of privilege and racist actions she encountered depending on the class of whites with which she interacts. Whites she encountered in the college environment were ignorant of their privilege and covertly racist compared to working class whites she knew who were often more overtly racist. When speaking of privilege she included herself and was cognizant of where she came from and what that meant in her day-to-day experiences.

Along with the internal tensions Shilo felt, she dealt with the pressures of proving herself in the African American campus community. The cumulative effect caused her to consider not

participating at times. “I mean I have had moments where I’ve just been like wow, it would be so much easier just to disengage. Like this is bullshit that I have to go through all this, in some ways.” There were times when she stopped participating and the only thing that got her to resume involvement within the community was genuine peer relationships. She added,

> beyond personal relationships in terms of the official work that I do like the activist component of it. It’s like social justice is something that is, is like me. You know it’s a part of how I decide myself. It’s a fundamental piece of myself. So to disengage with that, I don’t even know what else I would care about.

Being an activist, Shilo took issue with those on campus who did charity work like food drives and community projects and referred to themselves as activists. She also looked at the intention behind the work because students operated from a place of privilege by attending an institution like SVC. Shilo found value in volunteer activities and did some work with the volunteer office, but she did not feel that these volunteer activities were activism nor were her peer volunteers activists. Referring to the volunteers, “no matter where we came from before [attending this institution], we’re all going end up with that kind of privilege, that diploma that grants us access to all of these jobs and whatever else that may bring.” The insular nature of the campus means that SVC acted “like its own little weird little society.” Shilo left me with one last reflection about her time away from campus,

> it is funny because outside of the community, outside of [SVC] is totally different. Once I get outside of [the campus] I am just like ‘wow.’ I am not in the black community whatsoever. Nothing translates outside of [the campus] borders. And that is what is funny about creating a little community within this greater society – I guess the definitions I had while I was within [the campus community] just vanished. And I am just me without any of those kind of like social implications put on me or like how people know me.

CHAPTER 8

SUNSHINE VALLEY COLLEGE

Having presented the portraits of Margaret, Ronaldinho, Felix, and Shilo, it is important to illustrate the environment in which they existed on a daily basis. Sunshine Valley College (SVC) is the context in which the participants' portraits are grounded. SVC was founded in the late nineteenth century and has been described as a small, highly selective, and diverse liberal arts college. This institution was selected as the site of the study because white students were the highest demographic represented in the student body, commonly referred to as a predominantly white institution (PWI). These inherent and systemic ties to whiteness were intertwined into the experiences of each person on campus.

SVC is located in a moderately small community called "Urban Suburb" roughly 10 miles outside of a large city on the West Coast of the United States. A local metropolitan newspaper referred to Urban Suburb as a small town in a big city with a multicultural neighborhood. This makes SVC one of only a few liberal arts colleges in a major metropolitan area whose location provides the campus community with access to a multitude of local cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities. The campus has several buildings designed by a famous architect who also designed several noteworthy projects in the metropolitan area. Almost three-quarters of the students live on-campus in residence halls. At the time of the study (2008 – 2009), all first year students were required to live on campus, and in the 2009 – 2010 academic year, all second year students were also required to live on campus. Individually, the residence halls are co-ed, student governed, and each have Resident Advisors (RAs).

Sunshine Valley College enrolls nearly 2000 students from almost every state across the United States as well as from over 20 foreign countries. The student gender demographics at the

time of the study were as follows: 56% female and 44% male. Other demographic information for the students was as follows: 6.8% African American, 14.9% Asian American, 55.6% Caucasian, 2.7% International, 15.2% Latino/a, 1% Native American, and 8% declined to state. There were 150 full-time faculty who were demographically represented as follows: 6.7% African American, 12.6% Asian American, 67.4% Caucasian, and 13.3% Latino/a. The gender representation of the faculty was 45% female and 55% male. There were 21 campus recognized and categorized racial/ethnic/cultural groups, 18 of which were mono-ethnic focused student groups (College, 2008). Although the campus advertised a relatively diverse student makeup and complementary mission statement, the roots of the campus remained grounded in a predominantly white environment having emerged from a tradition of whiteness.

The campus, nestled in the heart of a residential community, is a couple blocks away from a busy thoroughfare, yet it felt quiet and tucked away from the city bustle. The middle to lower middle class areas that surround the college can mislead one into thinking the college reflects those modest neighborhoods. However, with a large endowment and an annual tuition cost of nearly $50,000, those attending the college are either from financially well-off families or receive financial assistance of some kind. The physical connection to and financial isolation from the surrounding community seemed an interesting dynamic.

I made my first of seven visits to SVC in late January of 2009 just after 3pm, and upon entering campus I couldn't help but notice students in shorts playing catch on a baseball diamond under cloudless blue skies. People were dressed for the summer wearing tank tops and shorts; it appeared as though the West Coast "winter" was in full swing with the weather topping off at 70 degrees that day. As the sound of flip-flops echoed around me in the quad, I thought about the harsh Winter I had left in mid-Michigan. The approach of skateboards mimicked an oncoming

train as the riders yelled out to one another about which path to take and what the evening's festivities might hold.

As 3:35 pm came and went, the cross campus foot traffic dramatically picked up, I imagined that classes had just let out. I began to survey the passersby in the main quad area protected by a grove of olive trees and surrounded by ornate fountains; the outwardly noticeable mix of races and ethnicities was apparent to me. That being said, white students still dominated my snapshots of the campus. The brief snippets of conversations that I heard were about the prices of food at the campus café, a friend's PMS side effects, class assignments, and potential plans for the evening. With less than an hour on campus, it struck me that these campus scenes could serve as the background for any number of TV shows, movies, or be in any campus brochure. All I felt that was missing was the obligatory game of Frisbee or random faculty member holding class outside on the grass.

Stopping at one of the many fountains to take in the atmosphere, I saw the library in the distance and decided to make my way there. As I ventured into the library, I was confronted with several signs noting procedures visitors needed to follow, as well as open exhibitions on display such as artifacts related to the then recently elected President Obama. The layout of the library was interesting as it was very divided in appearance and feel. The west wing of the library was very standard to me with row upon row of bookshelves and intermittent tables strewn about for reading and studying. In comparison, the east wing of the library had a distinctly small college feel with named rooms of past important people, portraits of previous presidents of the college, a smattering of leather chairs, and ornate stone work in the walls with high end trim circling the rooms. It harkened back to an older time; the walls of the building seemed to be older and constructed out of blocks of stone compared to the more contemporary wing.

While reviewing my conversations with participants and my experiences on campus, the issues of space on campus and the placement of physical artifacts came to the forefront. SVC had a cultural center that provided a creative space, serving as a "bastion for progressive thought on campus," according to online testimonials. The center also promoted community living, and in the opinion of one participant, the center was "the only institutional factor committed to multiculturalism and diversity" on campus. While touring the campus, I made it a point to investigate the multicultural center and see where it was situated on campus. It turned out that the "center" (which might also imply that it was centrally located) was actually located off campus across the street, in a converted residential building. Though I tried to take into account the finite amount of space available for construction on the main campus, I saw (as the participants and my on-campus informant did) the off-campus location of the cultural center as an indicator of the importance that the institution placed on diversity and multiculturalism. Physical space and proximity of the cultural center can demonstrate many things to members of the campus community, such as financial commitment, which in turn points to administrative decision-making and institutional values.

During my conversations with the four participants, we inevitably talked about white students and whiteness. During these discussions, the issue of space for racial/ethnic minority students (r/e ms) on campus came up in different ways. It appeared that there were very few places on campus that r/e ms were able to claim as their own, aside from the multicultural center; one such space was a group of tables in the campus cafeteria referred to as the black tables.

Shilo spoke about black tables as "a space that [the black student] community takes" as their own, adding that generally white students did not try to enter that informal communal area for students of color. As Shilo described the environment surrounding the tables, her pace picked

up: “It is always very energetic. It is like the center of, the hub of the community. It is like if you were in a city, [the black tables] would be downtown or something.” The participants all spoke about understanding and supporting students of color at SVC having safe spaces and public areas they could claim as their own because of the dominant white campus culture.

Discussing r/e ms groups at SVC, Ronaldinho and I talked about the necessity for marginalized subgroups to develop communities of support for one another at PWIs. He acknowledged that students of color formed support circles and established areas where they could reaffirm one another commiserating about experiences while being able to relax and mentally recharge. In addition to serving as a hub for black students, the cafeteria tables also served as a place for the larger campus community of color. The participants mentioned other racial/ethnic minority student groups who occupied the same areas as the black students. Shilo perceived there to be “strong alliances between Latino students, Asian students, and Black students; although I think that each group [has a] sub community as well.”

An event that took place at SVC that highlighted the racial campus climate was the joint meeting. The joint meeting, as it was known, was a meeting between the BSA and the White Student Social Justice Group (WSSJG) intended to generate positive dialogue by bringing the student groups together with one shared goal: social justice. The event was surrounded by a lot of excitement and drew a large attendance. The participants felt the meeting had latent potential to make some headway within the campus racial climate and culture. The BSA President began with an introduction about how the WSSJG was formed and Felix remembered, “she got very teary and was really happy that it had formed in the first place.” Although the high attendance was positive, there were many students, particularly ignorant and well intentioned white students, who were not prepared to openly and honestly discuss whiteness, racism and social

justice in a public forum. At no point in their retellings of the joint meetings did the participants reference the presence of an SVC faculty or staff member nor did it occur to me at the time to follow up with for further explanation. Later attempts to set follow up meetings were unsuccessful.

The meeting was emotionally intense. Ronaldinho described the joint meeting as "a really big sort of conflict." Attendees were asked by the BSA leadership to separate into two groups, whites and r/e ms, and generate questions to assist in a dialogue. The physical and mental separation seemingly led to a very divisive line across which the groups hurled ignorant comments and questions that hurt one another. I believe that the increased attendance by the general white campus community contributed to the miscommunication that ensued. Public discussions about race were extremely challenging for those in attendance, which may have resulted in the meeting doing more harm than good. None of the four students ever mentioned the presence of staff or faculty moderating the process. The white student group and general campus population were invited to attend a BSA meeting, which meant that all white students were guests and visiting a space that belonged to the students of color. Based upon their stories, the socio-spatial capital held by the BSA seemed to be (un)intentionally ignored by the white students whose privilege dictated that all spaces were white spaces. These differences in perspective contributed to intensifying an already uneasy situation.

The joint meeting and intense discussion about spatial issues had unified fallout for Felix, Ronaldinho and Shilo, in part contributing to decisions to stop attending BSA meetings. Felix elaborated on his withdrawal, stating "my feeling is just that if even a few people there are uncomfortable with [white students at the BSA meetings], I don't know that I really wanted to be putting them in that position." Shilo occasionally attended BSA meetings, but only when invited

by a friend who was a member. After being told by the BSA leadership to sit with the broader SVC audience of ignorant white students, even having previously attended BSA meetings, Shilo decided to withdraw. Following the joint meeting, the BSA had several meetings only for black students so they could process what occurred at the joint meeting. Ronaldinho said he understood why BSA had closed door meetings, moving him to stop attending BSA meetings. The joint meeting that began with murky but seemingly good intentions exemplified the racial issues and tensions that existed on campus, causing the three participants who attended BSA meetings to stop participating. Ronaldinho, Shilo and Felix stated they heard white students who attended the meeting saying things like "You (racial/ethnic minority students) should be happy that I'm here."

The racial campus climate began to take its toll on each of the participants in this study resulting in withdrawal from different facets of the campus community. Felix subsequently withdrew from BSA meetings and tried to support the r/e ms from the confines of the white student group. Ronaldinho stepped away from the BSA and started smaller social justice focused projects with a group of his friends. Shilo remained connected to her close-knit friendship circle of r/e ms but stopped attending BSA meetings. Felix added, "I think white people were kind of really like scared by it at first," and Shilo told me, "I mean it felt uncomfortable. You know but sometimes they always say like sometimes it's good to feel uncomfortable. It's important to be uncomfortable. Like sit with the discomfort."

Helping me construct a picture of the campus, Margaret told me about the liberal environment that SVC appeared to be on the surface. She explained,

> when I hear that SVC was voted the most liberal campus in the country I kind of wish that we were not presented in such an extreme light because there are a lot of students on campus that may not show it publicly but they are not necessarily with that whole typical liberal mindset which is peace, happiness, and let's all make sure that we do not hurt each others feelings all the time.

We discussed what it meant to be a liberal campus in more general terms, including whether the word liberal might mean the presentation and discussion of ideas in a freer environment, compared to her description of liberal being a more constrained and conservative environment.

Focusing on campus discourse and the pseudo-liberal culture may have been a product of Margaret's Humanities major. She told me she had always been interested in reading and film, but since coming to SVC had become "more sensitive to [discourse], a lot more attuned to noticing the finer aspects of discourse. How people converse and communicate with each other." Margaret came to these perspectives as a result of making statements and jokes that her peers told her were too intense, or that needed to be toned down. These comments and subsequent feelings made Margaret reexamine her ability to express herself and what being an American and member of the SVC community meant to her. "The thing about discourse that I have realized is how phenomenally little I know about the American experience because of the way I grew up because I know more about the immigrant experience."

The liberal climate that Margaret spoke about being constrained and conservative translated into what she and Ronaldinho referred to as a politically correct environment. Margaret said, "in my opinion I feel like it is the liberal point of view here at SVC because the majority view point is that we have to be very [politically correct] all the time." She went on to say, "I consider politically correct language to be very uncomfortable. It forces you to become so self conscious that you might even forget what it is that you are talking about." She shared her feelings and those of others that she spoke with from off campus who "described it as 'self-censorship' where the students here [at SVC] are so concerned with making sure that they say the right thing that they end up censoring themselves, but to a degree that is not necessary." Margaret felt the liberal and politically correct culture hindered many social and academic

exchanges because people were apprehensive of the labels and social ramifications often attached to ignorant statements. Ronaldinho echoed Margaret's feeling about the constrictive nature of SVC's culture, wanting more from his interactions than surface level pleasantries. He felt that shallow conversations were a result of his peers outside of the multicultural hall not wanting or able to engage in more complex conversations about personally difficult issues.

Margaret and Ronaldinho held disparate views on the benefits of a politically correct environment. Ronaldinho told me, "I think people have come to an understanding of that it is just something that does not make sense to really [say] at all and can be seen as offensive to a lot of people so there really is not any reason to be saying that…so why do it?" Margaret on the other hand looked for spaces where she could make jokes and freely express herself, and for people with whom she could "be comfortable and you are not going to stop me every 5 seconds and say that I have said something offensive." Margaret and I talked more about the two campuses she perceived existing at SVC, "I feel like no one really talks about the fact that a lot of us kind of secretly hate having to speak very politically correct and that we actually don't care."

The campus environment and perspective is an integral part of this research because it serves as both a player in and backdrop for each of the participant stories. Although the promotional materials of the campus along with the demographic information pointed to a diverse and inclusive environment, my conversations with the participants rang loudly of the multiple campuses that existed. In particular, I think back to Felix who spoke about the campus racial climate and how there was a "widespread ignorance amongst white students with regards to race or if not an ignorance, a kind of unwillingness to confront it or actually deal with it." Felix added that he believed that his white peers acted nonchalant in conversations about race and diversity as a defense mechanism with dismissive comments such as, "oh, we get it.

Whatever…Race is socially constructed blah, blah, blah." Shilo added, "people do not say the white institution or the white cafeteria, even though that is what it is. They would just say the black tables because it is the smaller population." The attention was placed on the marginalized, racial/ethnic minority students by the larger white campus culture. As a PWI, the environmental cues and climate of SVC contributes to the experiences of white students and was acknowledged by these white students who were once members of r/e ms groups.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION

After beginning conversations with each of the participants, I soon found that the factors and experiences motivating these white students to enter racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups and environments were not as easily compartmentalized as I first thought. As the students' stories unfolded and the analyses continued, the experiences of the participants individually and collectively contributed to the discussion that follows. In this chapter, Margaret is not referenced to the same degree as Ronaldinho, Shilo, and Felix, but only because stories from the others seemed better examples to showcase for different reasons. Regardless of the times to which she is directly referred, Margaret is constantly present throughout the discussion chapter because her stories and experiences are unique challenges to conceptions of whiteness. Margaret's stories also provided a glimpse into how whiteness and white guilt are transmitted in environments such as Sunshine Valley College (SVC).

This study was built around a purposefully situated conversation focused on race, privilege, and positionality. As I continue to find in the literature and my own experiences, whiteness is elusive yet; it permeates multiple facets of the lived experience, particularly in the confines of the United States. Whiteness exists concurrently as an explicit and implicit force influencing day-to-day experiences based upon a slue of factors, with race being most salient for this study. As a race and racialized perspective, whiteness is interwoven in all of the data for this study; it touches and shapes all the experiences these students present in their stories. Throughout this study, I consistently returned to the tenants of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to maintain a tight focus on issues of race and used Critical White Studies (CWS) to tight the focus further on issues of whiteness. These theoretical underpinnings influenced my methodological

implementation while onsite and helped drive the conversations that I had with my participants. All of the sections that follow address the affective side of the participants' whiteness and how it came to shape their perspectives about whiteness in relation to the world(s) around them.

In this chapter I lead by discussing whiteness, because it is a foundational component of this study threading through each of the subsequent sections. In each section, I explain how I understand the data related to a particular theme, present exemplars of that theme, and conclude with some synthesis leading to the implications in the following chapter.

I am Raced, I am White

Recognition by participants' of their whiteness was unnerving and resulted in a fairly immediate by-product: white guilt. Accepting whiteness was a gradual process ranging from lifting a tacky veil of racial ignorance to uncomfortably and painfully (at times) becoming aware of their race, privilege, and contribution to a larger system of privilege that comes at the expense of marginalized and displaced communities of color.

For the purposes of this study, I define reifying whiteness as the process by which whiteness is further entrenched, covertly and overtly through attempts to deflect racial discussion or shift from white guilt to a victimized role while allowing the current system of white privilege to continue (Bell, 1992; Feagin, 2010; Kendall, 2006; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). By acknowledging white guilt, white privilege, and their own whiteness, these participants began to combat the reification of whiteness in their sphere of influence.

Ronaldinho and Felix acknowledged that they were white and racial beings, but never spoke about their own whiteness directly. They spoke mostly about how they interacted with white friends and family. The level of interaction they were willing to embrace depended upon the proximity and intensity of the relationship with those whites to which they were referring.

Ronaldinho and Felix both recognized they were more apt to interrogate strangers and peers about issues of race and equity, while allowing the ignorant and racist views of their close circle of white friends and family members to pass unscathed. Acts such as these demonstrate how the students contribute to reifying whiteness through the defense of their white friends and family views on race.

Shilo faced her whiteness at several points throughout her K12 experience because of friendship circles, gaining perspective particularly through her relationship with her best friend Jen. Shilo's recognition of her own whiteness resulted in forsaking many of the cultural norms she associated with being white so she could be more accepted by communities of color at her school. Like Felix and Ronaldinho, later in life, Shilo also encountered friction with white friends regarding her perspective on race and social justice. However, unlike the two men, she chose to withdraw from the majority of her white friends and began to surround herself with primarily racial/ethnic minority peers.

The growing cognizance of their own whiteness made these racially aware white students more conscious of social norms, specifically white social norms, and they began to see how they impacted friends and peers who were r/e ms. The set of experiences and perspectives that each possessed, coupled with the intersectionality of other identities such as gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and geographical location led to different reactions.

Activism, Discomfort, Inactivity

The participants shared stories where they were in supportive environments that allowed them to interrogate race and racism. As social justice minded individuals, their stories highlighted their need for comforting spaces to engage in difficult dialogues. Discomfort can be too great an obstacle for whites that have no commitment to social justice (Helms, 1992; Reason

& Roosa Miller, 2005). In situations where there is perceived pressure or a minority majority, the white social justice advocates become uncomfortable, choosing to step away from the discomfort. Throughout this section, I use the terms uncomfortable and discomfort interchangeably. Having core friendship groups consisting primarily of white individuals who did not think as deeply and readily about issues of race, power, and privilege was stressful at times for all the participants, causing discomfort with their personal interactions and surroundings. Even though moments of discomfort were jarring and challenging, those moments became powerful learning tools.

Discomfort and withdrawal from r/e ms groups were present in the stories of Shilo, Felix, and Ronaldinho. They each found comfort in projects and spaces that they created or joined outside of the r/e ms groups, which allowed them to define terms of participation and subsequently moderate their level of discomfort. Being personally uncomfortable can potentially be an opportunity for growth when exploring self- perceived racial identity. Originally, these white individuals participated under the assumption that they could primarily be observers in the r/e ms group and experiential sponges soaking up their surroundings. These students by most accounts were activists and social justice minded, but still acted in white and contradictory ways promoting and preserving white privilege. They lacked the capacity to interrogate the implications of their racial retreat. As exemplars of critiquing whiteness, withdrawing because they were uncomfortable with their own whiteness demonstrated the difficulty that whites can face with embracing the benefits of being members favored by systemic privilege.

Aware that discomfort stemmed from racial and social justice issues to which they said they were committed, these students sought environments that were more comfortable for actively exploring these issues through what I have called social and personal activism. The

social activism of these students took place on and off campus in places of employment, student groups and organizations. Personal activism became the choices and actions that the students carried out in their familial and friendship circles.

Making personal connections and learning the struggles of friends can assist people in being more receptive to issues of power and privilege. In short, proximity matters. After a period of time, participation in the r/e ms group produced a growing individual level of discomfort resulting in the students' withdrawal, which they framed as a form of activism and participation from a distance. I began to see that these participants had activist intentions, and through their participation in the r/e ms groups, they were pushed towards a more defined role as an activist.

Being uncomfortable as sustained members of racial and ethnic minority groups, participants realized they had encroached on a safe space and believed that they could better serve these student groups as outside supporters. Overtime, saw that the activism these students participated in was intertwined with their discomfort and appeared to be very cyclical in nature. As a cyclical endeavor, it was difficult at times to discern whether the participants' discomfort was connected to wrestling with the reality of being raced, or being stunned by stumbling into a racialized awareness. The emerging answer was both. A racialized reality and stumbling into racial awareness acted as drivers for these white individuals to maintain a participatory group role in social justice activism, and withdrawal as a form of self-preservation.

(In)visible Whiteness, Racial/Ethnic Weight

As the participants became increasingly aware of themselves as racialized beings, they began to perceive the influence of racism in their friendship circles and macro occurrences such as campus and political initiatives. Arriving on campus for the first time, engaging in courses and dialogues about social justice issues provided all the participants with a new perspective,

language, and set of tools for critique. Although participants chose different academic paths, they were all exposed to social justice terminology and concepts because of Sunshine Valley College's (SVC) environmental influence. In particular, Shilo gained a new perspective about race, allowing transition to another vantage point in her thinking about race and diversity. The shift in perspective from purely social to academic investigation led Shilo to question what race meant to her, broadly as well as personally. SVC was a setting in which all the participants were able to draw upon their experiences to redefine their thoughts and perspectives on race.

Margaret clarified early on that she was not a typical white person; she straddled the racial line by looking white while being an immigrant and racial/ethnic Armenian minority. Margaret became truly aware of whiteness and the associated negativity once she joined the SVC community and was involuntarily lumped in with other white community members. Margaret introduced the concept of ethnic weight, as she understood it through her lenses and cultural experiences, describing the pressure she felt passed on from her family and the broader Armenian community. She felt pressure to maintain her culture and later was able to parlay her understanding of ethnic weight into white racial awareness issues. Expanding upon Armenian specific ethnic weight, I inserted systemic and individualized whiteness and then proceeded to apply white ethnic weight to the participants' stories.

For the other three participants, the weight of whiteness was conveyed through discussion of the students' racial membership and newfound consequence of their racial awareness. They noted having inherited white privileges in the American context because of their skin color. As they became cognizant of what being white meant, each participant's lens shifted, altering how they viewed and interacted with their day-to-day worlds. Combined, the participants' experiences became a broader picture of whiteness as a phenomenon that carried ethnic weight

and racial capital. Losing the veil of ignorance about how they contributed to the preservation of whiteness, the participants gained the weight of constantly being aware of their own whiteness. They also became aware of the daily choices they made to either combat whiteness or remain complicit.

Emotional Dissonance, Needing Intellectual Security

Being aware of their whiteness, facing emerging discomfort and racial/ethnic weight all led the participants to consider how best to support r/e ms groups. Our conversations explored how their converging realizations and feelings were experienced when carrying out their daily activities. The point of convergence crystallized for me as emotional dissonance (Jansz & Timmers, 2002). For the participants, the dissonance ultimately led to them stepping out of the r/e ms groups, choosing to support the groups from a distance, reestablishing personal, intellectual and emotional security.

When talking about the overall campus climate, Felix, Margaret, Shilo, and Ronaldinho all had friends who were racially (personally and interpersonally) ignorant white students who maintained privileged memberships in isolated cliques. Felix reflected that he and the white student group on campus struggled with demonstrating to r/e ms peers that they were willing to confront “stupid white people when they behave stupidly with respect to their whiteness.” One suggestion was for white students to create change from within the white community rather than being members of r/e ms groups and speaking out against whiteness. This suggestion, although logical, was difficult to carry out in these students’ friendship circles.

Preserving intellectual superiority, and subsequently, a feeling of intellectual security arose in conversations with Felix. Intellectualizing their emotional dissonance and the need for safe distance allowed participants to move away from the r/e ms groups. Felix expressed a lack

of security when not in a position of intellectual dominance, which led him to withdraw from participating in BSA. Having participated mostly in groups where the topics focused on intellectual things, he could be "sparry and be able to like push people around." Needing intellectual comfort allowed Felix, a white racial activist, to shake up and confront his white peers with counter viewpoints. Conversely, he was uncomfortable being intellectually shaken up himself while supporting and participating in minority student groups. He used intellectualization to a degree as a way to create distance, connecting the move to positive concepts of support for r/e ms groups.

Emotional dissonance spurred the participants towards endeavors that they shared as supportive of diversity and equity. Movement towards comfortable activities reduced their emotional dissonance resulting in strengthening students' intellectual security. These activities were described by participants as meaningful pathways for support of the r/e ms groups without being disruptive to the group's dynamics. For example, Ronaldinho's budding extracurricular project was focused on local campus awareness through a social justice newsletter. Shilo was active with Black Graduation Committee, which helped her remain connected to the community of color at SVC and support her friendship circle throughout their graduation process. Felix was forming a think tank to gather up and coming young political scholars to think about broader political issues and operate as part of a national consortium.

Emotional dissonance and intellectual security appeared to be drivers for participants to pursue alternate avenues of support that provided each the opportunity to still be involved with issues of social justice while providing a comfortable environment in which to operate. Regardless of the project, participants sought emotional asylum by moving out of direct participation in the r/e ms groups.

Family and Social Interactions

The participants arrived at SVC with a set of perspectives and experiences they accumulated along the way. Exposure to concepts, individuals, and alternative viewpoints occurred because of familial and social interactions.

Family Interactions

Throughout their lived experiences, participants described salient moments influenced by their families that happened both intentionally and unintentionally. These influential occurrences formed a foundation of racial awareness.

Margaret's early experiences and encounters with difference are interwoven and difficult to tease apart: school-Armenian culture-social-family. She talked about how her mother owned and operated a child daycare business, which inadvertently brought diversity into the home and had a lasting effect on Margaret. The poignant interaction that Margaret referenced was during her childhood, when she spoke with an interracial couple about the importance of understanding and embracing culture. The couple was impressed with Margaret and how her parents raised her. Reflecting back on this encounter, Margaret noted, "I think that was a pretty important moment, I always remember it."

Shilo shared several stories about her family and how they affected her early experiences by exposing her to multiple types of difference. Her mother was involved early on as a member of Bussing Program (BUSPRO) and served as a host family for a BUSPRO student, which brought diversity into close proximity like Margaret's experience. Interacting with this BUSPRO student in her home made Shilo realize that they were very different, from the color of their skin to the towns they grew up in to their cultural influences.

Margaret and Shilo spoke about the effect their families directly had on their contact with issues of difference. The women came from similar types of families and home environments where the community was predominantly homogenous. Margaret emerged from an insulated Armenian environment and ventured out into a world that was American and heterogeneous. Meanwhile, Shilo was in a predominately white environment and became involved with the small pocket of African Americans in her community. Both women talked about moments where they stumbled into diversity and other instances where they actively sought it out.

Ronaldinho had a similarly supportive family in which his mother was involved in her children's academic careers. She was active in selecting the K12 schools Ronaldinho attended and was part of a carpool program that assisted families without the means to get their children to school. Ronaldinho ultimately developed a different worldview than his family's that was evident in stories he shared about holiday gatherings and dinners. He became active on campus late in high school and continued at SVC in discussions about police treatment of racial/ethnic minority citizens and systemic issues related to the prison system. Although there seemed to be a venue for healthy debate in his family, they eventually agreed to disagree because of their entrenched white, conservative perspectives.

Ronaldinho's family provided a supportive environment for him to explore friendship groups and develop as a white raced individual. However, his family ultimately ended up disagreeing with his newfound perspectives on issues of social justice and race. Felix chose to exclude his familial experiences entirely from our conversations. Looking across all four participants, there seems to be a difference in gender when it comes to disclosing familial experiences. The connections between family interactions and their current racialized

perspectives were not as developed amongst the male participants as compared to the female participants.

Social Interactions

The participants spoke about salient moments that occurred in developing social lives outside of the home and away from their K12 settings that contributed to their increased racial awareness. All of the participants recalled direct and indirect experiences that set them on a path towards racial awareness. Felix and Shilo were exemplars of how catalytic experiences with racial/ethnic privilege and difference dramatically altered their perspectives.

Felix was exposed to racial discourse and critique as a member of the debate club where his catalytic experiences revolved around attending competitions throughout his state and across the country. Felix noted how the Black debate teams pointedly addressed race and privilege through the artful use of data, social literature and their experiences. He described one of several all black debate teams that used their allotted time to conduct a performance-based critique of social justice issues. Those rehearsed performance pieces were plays on Blaxploitation. The performances were moving for Felix and supportively challenged his growing knowledge of social justice literature.

Shilo's catalyst experience came through a close-knit friendship circle at a summer long writing camp where she became intensely aware of racial and socioeconomic difference. The camp ensured that diverse children attended, and Shilo noted that it "was the most racially, socioeconomically, academically diverse group of students that I had ever been immersed in." The shift in Shilo's racial perspective crystallized when she was accepted as a friend and family member of other camp attendees, many who were Black. Shilo spoke about the creation of a writing camp family, forming close bonds with many which she still maintains contact. Although

Shilo's family was supportive, there was contention and misunderstanding including with her sister, who attended the same writing camp, but never made the same kind of racial awareness breakthroughs: **"**I don't think my older sister understands completely my complicated relationship to race because I think that it never, it just was not a thing for [her] … because it was like such a thing for me."

Felix and Shilo highlighted how social settings and interactions with peers outside the family context exposed them to situations of enhanced racial awareness. The level and kind of interaction varied based on the participants' social context, but resonated deeply because of their connection to peers and the activities in which they were invested.

K12 Experiences

The K12 experiences were stories about how the academic environment supplemented, and in some instances, initiated development of racial awareness. The K12 contexts allowed students to explore experiences and interactions with people who were similar to and different from them. These interactions gave racial difference a human face that allowed each participant to develop racialized perspectives, particularly the budding awareness of their own whiteness. The Elementary and Middle School and High School subsections highlight select instances of each participant where their individual racial awareness was both encouraged and challenged.

Elementary and Middle School

In a racially homogenous and privileged private K9 school, Felix had moments that challenged his racial awareness. Issues related to race, privilege and power were introduced through academic and extracurricular activities. Felix was exposed to curricula that broached diversity through readings and supplementary discussions. As a member of a student group outside of the classroom, he was exposed to ideas broadly focused on diversity. Even as Felix

became familiar with those terms and concepts, two of his instructors who were African American faced racist and homophobic comments and personal attacks. Felix witnessed how individual acts of hate and racist systemic pressures were directed at those two school employees. The combination of overt and covert acts of oppression along with a growing understanding of social justice concepts shaped his thinking about race in general, his own race specifically, and moved him towards the use of more critically focused commentary.

Ronaldinho spoke about the diversity of his K9 student body and how "it was definitely something that everyone cherished, just having all these people in the school and being able to talk to people from different backgrounds." In middle school, Ronaldinho participated in a weeklong "cultural relations" program where students were introduced to concepts of race, privilege, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status. Although Ronaldinho enjoyed the program and talking about such issues, he felt the majority of students treated it as a hurdle they had to get through for a couple of hours. Ronaldinho reflected that his experience in the stratified K9 School affected his worldview as he acquired new terms with which to categorize and identify what was happening around him. Seemingly mundane references, such as terms for the academic tracks of children, appeared as code words for different racial/ethnic and socio-economic groups rather than as a reference to their academic ability.

Felix and Ronaldinho were both introduced to concepts of social justice through programs in their middle schools. The introductory theories and terms provided initial lenses to examine the racialized world around them, and allowed them to begin to see themselves as part of that racialized context, as raced, white individuals. Although their experiences were effectively different, they both saw individual oppression, systemic racism and privilege existing around them.

High school

High school was a place and time for each of the participants to further develop their own racialized identities. They each had some experience(s) that caused them to reflect on their identity as well as on difference, social justice, etc. Their experiences varied and at times were difficult for them to process, but in the end resulted in incremental changes in their perspectives on the race/ethnicity of others and themselves. I highlight Margaret and Felix's stories about how they began to view racial awareness during their time in high school.

As we talked about Margaret's experiences, she described the transition to high school as a culture shock, both being with Armenians from different parts of the world and having a broader array of racial/ethnic classmates. Although Margaret's high school was a public institution, the student body was predominantly Armenian (reported by Margaret as over 50%).

As Margaret became accustomed to high school and her confidence rose, the value she had for her culture and heritage led to her regularly seek out people from different racial/ethnic groups. Margaret and her friends traded cultural information such as language and personal histories with one another. The "American kind of norms for interacting with different people" as Margaret put it, was something that most people raised in the United States took for granted. Margaret cherished these difficult but supportive experiences because they prepared her for the "real world." She felt better equipped to deal with diverse people and settings as compared with some of her more secluded Armenian peers.

Felix wanted a change from his constrained social environment and saw the choice to move from his small, prestigious private K-9 school to the larger, public urban high school as an escape. The transition was a culture shock because the racial/ethnic make-up was more diverse and the student body was much larger. After settling into his new high school, Felix began to see

how his white classmates from private school reacted to their new, more diverse public school environment. He became more cynical and critical of his privileged white peers and realized that the goals and expectations they had for their high school experiences were different from his own. Felix felt those students were cultural and academic tourists who maintained a safe distance from meaningful interactions, as they chose to stay insulated and isolated from their r/e ms peers.

Margaret and Felix transitioned to high school environments vastly different from their K9 experiences. They found a more diverse student body, which they embraced over time, compared to peers who chose to remain isolated and insulated in familiar cliques. The environmental changes provided them with opportunities to search for cultural difference and apply developing concepts of social justice. Having different upbringings and racial/ethnic backgrounds, Margaret and Felix arrived at more salient racial identities and critical perspectives than those of their white peers.

The SVC Campus Institutional and Racial Climate

As I spent time at SVC, time with the participants, and time with the data, I realized that the institutional context was a much bigger player than initially thought. The participants were attracted to SVC for a host of reasons, one of which was the espoused institutional commitment to social justice and diversity through the availability of several courses and academic options. As they transitioned to higher education with a set of raw lenses, perspectives, and racial awareness, the students spoke about the racial campus climate of SVC. Based on these perceptions, whiteness was intertwined in the experiences of each person on the SVC campus.

Convocation was a poignant introduction to the SVC campus climate for Margaret and her entering class because it sent a message about the perceived versus actual campus racial climate. At convocation, the incoming first year class wore caps and gowns and entered in a

processional. After an introduction and a few words from the campus administration, “Joseph”, the student body and Black Student Alliance (BSA) President addressed the entire class. Margaret spoke of the shared anxiety in the crowd of newly admitted students about attending college and how Joseph had “his chance to kill any last minute fears that anybody had about choosing to come to this school”, but proceeded to do the exact opposite. Referencing the name of a building on campus which was also a slang racial slur, Joseph spoke about how he saw the campus as racist and that he aspired to be the next Malcolm X pushing for revolution. This left Margaret and her parents questioning their choice to attend SVC. Margaret reflected that the convocation speech “kind of tainted my perspective” of SVC’s racial campus climate.

The participants all touched on the frequency of discourse on campus, yet believed it was also sanitized. For example, Margaret explained that SVC was recognized for being a liberal campus and felt these accolades presented the campus in such an extreme light that it was overly politically correct. Specifically, she noted that SVC was very liberal but saw liberalism as a constrictive ideology to which people adhered to avoid persecution. Margaret’s off-campus friend described campus conversations as self-censored and shackled by strict adherence to political correctness. The mix of liberalism and political correctness resulted in conversations that were choppy and so disjointed that people sometimes forgot what they were saying because they were focused on not offending anyone. Eventually, we acknowledged that the general campus population might have been a more politically correct environment because individuals wanted to avoid making inadvertent socio-racial missteps.

The perceptions of campus community members, in particular whites, contributed to the institutional racial climate. Participants told me about the perceptions of campus spaces considered segregated by their white peers. These white peers did not understand why r/e ms

congregated together at SVC, a predominantly white environment. Because of this, “you don’t really find [white] people willingly trying to” enter spaces that r/e ms have made their own. Shilo described the vibe in this area as electric. Felix said he never really saw tables in the lunch area as a clear divide but it was something that people talked about behind the scenes. As the ownership shifted from white students to students of color, the tables were re-named ‘the black tables’ to represent the racial/ethnic students who now frequented them.

We talked about barriers that existed between students of color and white students on campus. There appeared to be several distinct cultures simultaneously existing on campus, which involved the existence and acknowledgement of racial radar, a term I drew from Shilo’s comments. Shilo found it hard to understand why issues of race and difference were not on everybody’s agenda at SVC, but felt that for “some white students, that’s not on their radar.” SVC seemed to attract students on opposite ends of the racial awareness spectrum. On one end were students aware of their own race and on the other, those who were ignorant of issues of race and privilege. When racially unaware students arrived on campus, they saw diverse students and began to encounter issues with the baggage of whiteness in relation to themselves. In Felix’s opinion, a divide along with some tension existed on campus because **“**white people don’t like being told that they do bad shit and that like they’re benefiting from the system.” Margaret believed that many white students at SVC “feel a lot of animosity” about being pigeon holed because of their skin color and not welcomed into cultural groups or sponsored events.

The students talked about a campus in which diversity was promoted and simultaneously, whiteness was criminalized. It was a campus in which spaces were set up for r/e ms as safe spaces, but seen as self-segregation by white students. Participants talked about white ignorance on campus linked to claims of reverse racism. They believed white ignorance was entrenched

and resistant to a healthy discussion about what race meant, how certain races were privileged, and the development of racial preference in the American experience. They spoke of reaching out to white students to be more open to discussions about racial issues and interrogation of their own privilege. Participants agreed that white students could not be overtly confronted with concepts of white privilege because they might have been raised in an environment of whiteness and unawareness. Lacking experience with constructive critical discussions can occasionally result in white people saying, as Felix put it, “stupid sort of racist shit.” I believe that the difficulty seemed to lie with white people not being prepared to handle open and pointed critique that interrogated existing power structures.

Multicultural Hall

The multicultural hall was described as a refuge for r/e ms on campus that was both communal and isolationist. The hall was intended to provide an environment in which residents could immerse themselves in multiple conversations supplemented by social justice activities. All four participants understood why the multicultural hall was needed on campus to build community for r/e ms. Shilo and Felix in particular explained why their friendship groups primarily consisted of white students as a byproduct of their placement in halls that had no diversity focus. Ronaldinho lived in the hall at the time of the interviews and Margaret was a resident there in her first year.

The multicultural hall was an environment that fostered racial awareness in stark contrast to the larger white campus culture. Describing the multicultural hall, Ronaldinho talked less about the overall building, and more about his perception of the spaces that existed and the discourse that emerged. Ronaldinho described discussion as natural and comfortable, fostered by the community atmosphere and inclusive culture of the hall. Discourse etiquette was very

important to Ronaldinho and seemed to be engrained into the culture of the hall. He thought people in the hall were "comfortable talking about [sensitive issues] even if sometimes it might possibly become a little bit more uncomfortable or somebody says something that somebody else doesn't really groove with; we need that sort of space to be able to feel safe and be able to talk about these sorts of things."

As a resident of the hall, Margaret told me that students living there felt it was their home, their sanctuary and as such, outsiders were not allowed to enter freely. Margaret added that there was a war of words in the editorial section of the paper prior to her arrival on campus, stemming from an incident where the author wanted to visit a friend in the hall and was denied entry. Shilo told me about the same editorial pieces published about the multicultural hall, explaining that the general white campus population challenged the existence of the hall. While talking with Ronaldinho, I said that it appeared that in stories I was privy to, the multicultural hall was portrayed as a divisive element on campus. He agreed, saying, "Yeah. It's a little bit of a hot topic."

As discussed earlier, the lack of racial radar of white students across SVC was in stark contrast to the r/e ms in the multicultural hall. Descriptions of the multicultural that were shared were less about the building physically, and more about perceptions of space on campus and the subsequent discourses that emerged. To participants, the etiquette of discourse and topics of social justice within the hall seemed contrary to the more constrained discussions that took place elsewhere on campus. The lack of racial radar, constrictive nature of the campus racial climate, and politically correct dialogue limited the spaces in which uncomfortable but necessary social justice focused conversations could blossom. Ronaldinho found the multicultural hall as a space for r/e ms to decompress and discuss issues related to race and unique experiences. Margaret on

the other hand, found the constant discussion about race and social justice overwhelming and taxing, resulting in her leaving the multicultural hall after her first-year. The multicultural hall at SVC was a refuge to r/e ms and an example of self-selected segregation for the white students.

Outsider Status

Being white students at SVC positioned these participants as majority members. Their whiteness afforded privileges in white situations but served as an obstacle in communities of color. Participants acknowledged their outsider status within communities of color and encountered mental and emotional fatigue as they worked through that status to prove themselves. Outsider status is a term that I used to describe how these four individuals expressed their experiences attempting to interact with r/e m peers.

As each of the participants developed knowledge about issues of race, power, and privilege, they became increasingly uncomfortable with whiteness and how they interacted with some whites. Each participant communicated that terrible things had been, and continued to be done to communities of color that benefitted whites. As racially aware whites, the students were also well versed in theory about white privilege and oppression. Even with this experiential and academic knowledge, students struggled with how to connect their informed positions to their daily confrontation with whiteness. For example, as Shilo began taking social justice courses, she experienced an increased level of care and understanding of issues of race, power, and privilege. Shilo's intellectual development resulted in distance building up between herself and her friends, increasing dissatisfaction with her social situation, and ultimately, changing her friendship circles. The shift prompted her to apply to work at the campus cultural center at the beginning of her second year at SVC, which opened up a whole new community to her, the community of color on campus.

Margaret's combination of domestic and international perspectives made her an outsider between the white majority and r/e ms. Her apparent white social capital and how she interacted with the campus environment put her in positions in which she was connected to and disconnected from the larger campus community. As she walked me through various situations in which she related to immigrant or global experiences, I began to see her connected to a global society. Margaret said she was enthralled with and embraced American culture, but at times related to contextual phenomena such as racism and slavery. Margaret's dual cultural-societal perspective allowed her to feel for oppressed minority groups as well as appreciate those who stood up for issues unrelated to them.

Participants expressed that peers, especially those who were members of racial/ethnic minority groups, challenged them in situations that included facing skeptical students of color, being unable to join in group conversations, and understanding that they were entering spaces of color not intended for white perspectives. Understanding core issues related to social justice and an awareness of their whiteness allowed participants to be more accepting of their status as outsiders. Felix and Ronaldinho wanted to be present in r/e ms groups without being a disruption. Shilo wanted to maintain the purpose and safety of r/e ms groups by not participating in meetings. Margaret was unsure if she or other whites were even welcomed in r/e ms groups. It appeared that the outsider status that Ronaldinho and Felix expressed was compounded by their discomfort as minority members of a majority minority student group. Their personal feelings and perceptions of discomfort were in opposition to their expressed concern about disrupting the group's dynamics and members' comfort levels. Reflecting on the students' stories and emotions, it appeared that they chose paths of least personal resistance, participant observer, and ultimately, non-participation.

Social Tourism

It is important to understand that most physical space is considered white space when discussing social tourism. Social tourism refers to how whites use their race-based privilege to become cultural and social tourists through limited, low risk participation in r/e m activities. Being white provides many privileges that play out differently in day-to-day experiences. This concept arose from the stories and experiences of Felix and Shilo and was later supplemented by Ronaldinho.

Felix was the first participant to share observations about white student tourism. He recalled how white students at his high school interacted with students of color from a safe physical and cognitive distance. After limited interactions, the white students returned to their white friendship circles. Felix unfortunately found that the same tourist actions took place at SVC.

Shilo also spoke about the tourism patterns of white students. She referenced white students she knew who maintained pre-existing cliques as well those at her middle and high schools who watched the BUSPRO students from afar. Shilo also felt white students at SVC were social tourists through participation in campus sponsored community service programs. These programs provided SVC students with structured opportunities to access r/e m groups in the surrounding communities through experiences that were time limited, after which students could return to their insulated white environments. White privilege and systemic whiteness are maintained through intentional acts of oppression to preserve the status quo. Being a tourist provides a safety net for white students because they are able to be participant observers in r/e ms group activities.

You are White AND You Know it…Now What?

The participants spoke about how encountering their own whiteness affected their day-to-day and life experiences. The stories of Felix, Margaret, Ronaldinho, and Shilo are entangled in whiteness, so it is important to acknowledge how whiteness intersects to show how the students struggled through and ultimately faced their whiteness. The stories and experiences participants shared indicated that they were aware of racial and social justice issues to varying degrees. They made efforts to connect with peers of color, moving from actively trying to set aside their white privilege to fully invoking it when they chose to withdraw from r/e ms groups. The participants' withdrawal was based in part on pressures of their newfound racial/ethnic minority status within the r/e ms group. This section describes the challenges that participants faced dealing with their sense of self/identity related to whiteness and how they responded to specific challenges. Their personal realization and perception came from a convergence of SES, gender, race, and campus context in addition to the direct and gradual exposure to ethnicity and privilege.

Thinking about the campus climate and where r/e ms congregated, Shilo chuckled saying it was laughable how the campus was "a really hyper-segregated environment." After talking about space that was uniquely for students of color, I asked if there were similarly situated groups of tables where white students might congregate, to which she knowingly informed me that every other space on campus was a white space. "The cafeteria is white. It's just like the whole institution is white." At the time of the interview, Shilo had spent a semester away from SVC, and the distance gave her a new vantage point on the campus. She saw that the campus as "very, very segregated."

Dissonance between their respective friends grew more salient for Felix and Ronaldinho as their level of racial knowledge developed. Conversations and interactions became increasingly strained until they established parameters to avoid topics related to race, power, and privilege.

Felix said his friends knew to avoid issues of race and privilege because of his personal connection to and involvement in campus groups. Although Felix believed that his white friends were good people, they did not have an overt racial awareness, which sometimes created discomfort where he had to speak up against them. Felix and Ronaldinho both found themselves fighting for racial and social justice without antagonizing their racially ignorant white friends whose mindsets helped maintain white privilege.

Acknowledging Privilege

One of the ultimate privileges afforded to whites is the ability to both acknowledge and ignore issues of race, privilege, and power. Acknowledging their privileges, and in particular, their white privilege, was a process that began before the participants were at SVC. Once on campus, they each had experiences that further challenged and developed their understanding of privilege. The challenges for participants were different in scope and occurrence but were individually impactful, none-the-less. These experiences and perspectives on privilege must be juxtaposed with the acknowledgement that all students who attend SVC are privileged in multiple ways, simply by being at an institution like SVC. The participants each were conscious of their privilege in the following examples and as previously noted; they exercised their white racial privilege when they withdrew from the r/e ms groups.

Debate gave Felix a solid base for critique, but it originated in an exclusive setting and privileged community. He talked about the exclusionary debate culture and how debate tended to alienate people. Along with honing his skills and familiarity with critical theory, Felix witnessed groups of racial/ethnic minority debaters questioning white culture and systemic whiteness. He was torn between an activity that he cherished and the acquired knowledge that it was privileged, and perpetuated a state of privilege.

In high school, Ronaldinho had a core group of primarily white friends but made a conscious effort to expand his friendship circle by seeking out people from racial/ethnic minority groups in search of new stories and experiences. Acknowledging privilege early on and placing a value on diversity led him to SVC. Ronaldinho chose SVC because he wanted to experience diversity and be exposed to different environments, which ultimately led him to live in the multicultural hall. He said that the college had "diversity as an important part of the mission statement and so that is what kind of attracted to me, as well as the small school environment, and being able to work with professors one on one."

Shilo began to see herself as a racial being because of relationships she developed with r/e ms as acquaintances, best friends, and boyfriends, and began to recognize her position of privilege. In order to feel like she fit into the culture, Shilo made herself over by adopting fashions worn by r/e ms in her school. In retrospect, she realized that her friendship circles represented what she wanted and needed in her life. Her involvement with r/e ms was in part a result of filling the void she felt existed in her life.

Being personally aware of their white racial identities was a determining factor of participants' choice to attend SVC. Acknowledging white privilege was a difficult first step that Ronaldinho, Shilo, and Felix took while at SVC. The academic and conversational components of acknowledging their whiteness and privilege allowed each student to maintain a comfortable distance. As challenges arose in their personal lives surpassing the realms of intellectual discourse and comfort, the participants exercised their ultimate white privilege, which was to step away from a minority status that was personally uncomfortable.

Facing Their Whiteness

Our conversations exposed the struggles and events that each of the participants was privy to as they confronted, reconciled, and embraced (to varying degrees) their whiteness. I encountered discussions about whiteness that appeared self-deprecating and as a perceived lack of pride in one's racial/ethnic heritage. This honest appraisal was necessary in order to deconstruct systemic and oppressive whiteness, and participants shared that it was difficult but required to combat whiteness as a white person. As a white person speaking about whiteness and privilege, inauthenticity, whether perceived or actually present, can reify whiteness.

Ronaldinho began to be exposed to his whiteness in elementary school and was reminded regularly by his mother about a specific instance in kindergarten. As Ronaldinho and his mother toured the school, they noticed that in the advanced classrooms the students were mainly white children, while the lower tier classes contained primarily r/e ms. The strange thing to Ronaldinho retrospectively was that white children bussed into the school from the suburbs were overwhelmingly represented in the advanced classes while racial/ethnic minority children from the area surrounding the school were in lower tiered courses. Not only were the academic courses different, but also other facets of their elementary experiences were separate such as gym and recesses.

Shilo was at another place cognitively with respect to her whiteness and relationships with r/e ms than her white college peers and friends, which perplexed them. Shilo perceived that her friends did not want to take a proactive stance towards race; instead they sought personal relief by trying "to understand how to eliminate the tensions [about race] that they felt." Shilo said her friends wanted to feel less awkward when engaged about issues of race, privilege, and difference. Similarly, the participants touched on how they felt awkward as they discovered their

own racial ignorance. As they worked on mitigating their racial ignorance they learned how to be better communicators about issues of racism and whiteness in multiple types of discussions.

Referring to her first experience with a member of an antiracist white student organization on campus, Shilo felt it was a backwards process. Her initial observation of the group of white students was that they focused on not wanting to be seen as racist, rather than doing anything that directly contributed to positive change on campus. Felix provided an alternate perspective about how difficult it was to convince white people that they were ignorant of racial issues. Without being able to see that they were ignorant, it was nearly impossible for white students to acknowledge that they benefitted from an inherently oppressive systemic power. These barriers to racial cognizance made being able to take steps to counteract oppression inconceivable.

Inclusive environments and participating in r/e ms groups can be challenging for even the most prepared and racially conscious white students. The experience of acknowledging the negative capital of their racial privilege was disconcerting as participants faced their whiteness in r/e ms contexts. The bottom line is that conversations about race and privilege are tough to have, tough to hear, and tough to process for ignorant whites. That being said, these conversations need to take place to maintain positive movement towards a racially and socially just society.

After leaving the friendly confines of their white friendship circles, participants entered social environments in which they were the overt minority. Returning to white groups with newfound racial experiences, their perspectives were altered. The topics they engaged in without getting into disagreements changed as well. Racial consciousness led to verbal conflict and pushed both the participants and their friendship circles to a more politically correct zone to avoid further discomfort. As they began to acknowledge their whiteness, students encountered

whiteness writ large and subsequent otherness that existed in their hometowns and on their campus. As participants became more aware of their multiple forms of implicit and explicit capital, they freed up some personal space to focus on their privileged status as white persons. Conversely, through encounters with members of racial/ethnic minority groups, they found that the same forms of capital they benefited from in a white context became hurdles and detriments to them while interacting with communities of color.

All the participants referred to our time together as an interesting process of reflection while they revisited lived experiences. They each spoke about how early exposure to race and difference generated a noticeable level of dissonance within each of them. As they internalized concepts such as existing as racial beings, they each struggled and grappled with what the concepts meant as well as how they played out in daily life. Each participant benefited from the open and accepting dialogues that organically evolved in their individual friendship circles. Applying the definition of reify to whiteness, I conclude it further entrenches whiteness through attempting to deflect racial discussions from white acknowledgement to a white victimized role, which allows the current system of white privilege to continue. By acknowledging white guilt, white privilege, and their own whiteness, these participants have begun the incremental process of chipping away at the reification of whiteness within their spheres of influence.

CHAPTER 10

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The intent of this dissertation is to understand how whiteness is experienced by social justice minded white students when interacting with racial/ethnic minority student (r/e ms) groups. White students are the focus of this study because their experiences as members of racial/ethnic minority student groups are silent in the literature and may provide a launching point to explore interactions between white and racial/ethnic minority students within mono-ethnic student groups. The participants (Margaret, Ronaldinho, Felix, and Shilo) were four; white undergraduate students attending Sunshine Valley College (SVC) who were sustained members of institutionally recognized r/e ms groups such as Black Student Alliance or Asian/Pacific Islander Student Group. The location for this study was as important as the participants because it was the context in which they existed and experienced day-to-day. SVC is a small, highly selective predominately white (PWI) liberal arts college located on the West Coast of the United States with a dominant white culture seeded with white privilege and inherently holding whiteness as the norm. Despite the dominance of white culture, SVC's institutional mission highlights a social justice orientation and seeks to be a diverse and welcoming campus. The research was guided by an overarching question: what are the motivating factors and experiences of white students who participate in racial/ethnic minority student groups?

The exploratory nature of the study and sensitivity of the topic called for one-on-one interviews with participants in order to build rapport to gather their individual experiences. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, each conversation had a unique style and direction. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with notes taken

during the interview. Interviews ranged between one and a half to five hours depending on the type of conversation and rapport developed. I also collected drawings from the participants and made general site observations to help triangulate their stories. I used portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) to textually paint and re-present the experiences of white students who were contributors in racial/ethnic minority student groups at this PWI. Portraiture draws from narrative and ethnographic methods, combining the re-presentation of the participants' stories with the onsite experiences of the researcher.

Along with portraiture, the project was theoretically grounded in critical race theory (CRT) and critical white studies (CWS). CRT places race at the center of scholarly discourse and constantly examines norms, beliefs, and processes that lead to racial inequities (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney Lopez, 1996; Kendall, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Milner IV, 2007). CWS "places the spotlight of critical scrutiny on the power of whiteness and how it can be understood, interrupted, and transformed" (Apple, 1998, p. x). CWS repositions the perspectives and experiences of white people to illuminate their membership in the dominant identity group (Frankenberg, 1993; Wellman, 1977) and distinguish how that association knowingly or unknowingly serves them as individuals.

Portraiture searches for emergent themes throughout the daily onsite process of data collection as well as in the post-collection phase when the researcher returns home. Constructing emergent themes from the multiple data collected utilized fives modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast referred to as repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, institutional and cultural rituals, triangulation, and revealing patterns. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) sum up the five mode process of analysis in the following:

> The first (and most common) identifies the visible and audible refrains spoken and enacted by actors over and over again in various contexts. Emergent themes are also

> heard in the resonant metaphors voiced by the actors, capturing in a few words a wide angle of experience and deep meanings shared by many. These metaphors are often embroidered into the rituals and ceremonies that symbolize – through art, music, dance, poetry – what the institution values. The portraitist also discovers emergent themes through triangulating data from a variety of sources and underscoring the points of convergence. But patterns do not always develop out of convergence; they must also be discerned through reflecting on the dissonant strains, through discovering the order in chaos, through finding the coherence in what often seems inchoate and scattered to the actors in the setting. (p. 214)

The various modes discussed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis encourage a cyclical research process in which the initial set of research questions and assumptions are questioned, reinforced, and modified with every interaction. "Researchers' day-to-day process of listening for emergent themes functions as a sort of on-site hypothesis finding and testing. At the end of the day, portraitists review field notes, log observations while they are fresh in their minds, and begin to reflect on the emergence of possible themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 217).

SVC is a PWI with a moderately diverse student body given the demographic diversity reflected in the surrounding community and larger metropolitan area. Although the campus espouses diversity values and a diverse student population, it was a campus forged in the traditions of whiteness maintaining most spaces by and for white students, making whiteness overtly and covertly intertwined in the experiences of each person on campus. As we discussed their experiences leading up to and while at SVC, the participants talked about how they encountered their own whiteness. The participants reflected on various moments throughout their lived experiences where they have had to acknowledge, confront, and work on reconciling their whiteness in the American context.

Participants commented directly and indirectly about the organizational and racial climate of SVC. They addressed peer and friendship circles, campus dynamics and customs as well as

the climate in the classroom and interactions with faculty. Topics ranged from political correctness and liberalism, to perceived student segregation patterns, to a joint meeting between a white student group and the Black Student Alliance. Participants described the campus as promoting diversity and simultaneously criminalizing whiteness. They shared stories and perceptions about the same physical spaces on campus, which often *looked* very different based upon whose story I was hearing.

While I consider these participants to be cognizant and understanding of racial and social justice issues, the students sought environments that were comfortable for them. Incidences deemed 'uncomfortable' as members of r/e ms groups were situated in the students' realization that they were encroaching on safe spaces for r/e ms, subsequently leading to decisions to withdrawn and support these groups from a distance. Through their struggles, stories, and our time together, we interrogated contemporary racism and white privilege, engaged issues related to the construction and maintenance of whiteness, and questioned the recreational aspect of diversity issues for white students while challenging contemporary white supremacy. They believed that they could better serve these student groups and populations as outside supporters, which provided them distance from uncomfortable encounters.

Throughout our conversations, participant stories kept circling back to what is commonly known as campus climate. To accurately depict what their stories referred to, it is necessary to go one step further and label it as campus *racial* climate (antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Hurtado, 1998). The nature of race and racism in higher education has limited the discussion of campus racial climate to conversations on the periphery because of the attached meanings, emotions, and history of racism rooted in the American context (Bell, 1992; Feagin, 2010; Sullivan, 2007). The participants talked about being activists within social and personal settings around issues of

diversity, equity, and social justice. I consider social activism to be related to their professional endeavors and extracurricular organizations. Personal activism consists of the choices and actions that the students carried out in their day-to-day interactions in familial and friendship circles.

Social Tourism

Social tourism is a term that Felix introduced when describing the transition and actions of white students from private K8 schools to a larger public high school. I took Felix's initial observation and applied the term to the white student experience the other participants described. In particular, I focused on the ability of white students to move out of normative whiteness (which is the lynch pin of campus racial climate) to briefly interact with r/e ms groups and activities. Once racially satiated or agitated, the white students withdrew back to normative whiteness where they could observe students of color from a comfortable distance within the confines of their cliques and friendship circles. As social and cultural tourists, whites tap into their white privilege invoking systemically based racial privileges while participating in multiple types of r/e m activities. Along the way, the use of ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006) and epistemological ignorance (Mills, 1997) by whites who move into and out of r/e m groups are presented as personal racial preservation tools. Ultimately, whites use their race-based privilege to become social and cultural tourists through limited, low-risk participation in racial/ethnic minority activities.

White privilege provides white individuals with the option to acknowledge the daily, inherent benefits that we, as whites, receive (Akintunde, 1999; Allan, 2003; Blackshire-Belay 1998; Brown II, 2000; Clegg, 1999; Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Manglitz, 2003; Osborne & Young, 2006; Quezada & Louque, 2004; Reynolds & Pope, 2005;

Rodriquez, 1999; Sanders, 1999; Turner & Myers, 2000). I viewed white privilege as the set of unearned advantages that are coupled with the choice to acknowledge and/or ignore those advantages (Allan, 2003; Jensen, 2003; Lensmire, 2011; McIntosh, 2003; Turner & Myers, 2000). I believe white privilege is a foundational piece of the daily experiences of all citizens in the United States with different influences based upon our skin color. Jensen (2003) succinctly described the "ultimate white privilege: the privilege to acknowledge you have unearned privilege but ignore what it means" (p. 79).

The systemic nature of privilege that Allan speaks of is affirmed by Turner and Myers (2000) who state that "privilege exists for those who need not concern themselves with the painful sense of 'otherness' on a daily basis, and can remain blissfully ignorant of what that experience is" (p. 228). As members of the majority culture, whites possess an inherent ability to engage 'others' on white terms and conditions. Majority members have the distinct ability to disengage with minority members and situations, and fade back into the whiteness of the dominant culture that is prevalent at PWIs. As a point of privileged choice, these students entered racial/ethnic minority spaces leading to cognitive dissonance challenging their inherent frame of ontological expansiveness. Internalizing the negative feelings resulted in students removing themselves from the source of discomfort, which preserved a core portion of their epistemological ignorance.

Whites engaged in Social Tourism utilize ontological expansiveness to control challenging racial and cultural interactions. As whites talking about race, racial problems and participating in r/e m groups; we must be aware of ontological expansiveness introduced by Sullivan (2006):

> one of the predominant unconscious habits of white privilege is that of ontological expansiveness. As ontologically expansive, white people tend to act and think as if all

> spaces – whether geographical, physical, linguistic, economic, or otherwise – are or should be available to them to move in and out of as they wish. (p. 10)

The primary connection between social tourism and ontological expansiveness is the false sense of ownership of all spaces (as white spaces), which are available for whites to move in and out of with no connections or repercussions. Ontological expansiveness allows for the white mentality behind social tourism to be interrogated and ultimately altered.

Helms' (1992) White Racial Identity Development (WRID) Model serves as a point of departure to discuss the "location" of the students interviewed. It is a linear model comprised of two phases, each with three stages, through which white individuals progress (or regress) as they navigate racial experiences and encounters in their lives. The end goal, according to Helms, is a positive white identity. Social Tourism links to WRID in two stages simultaneously: Disintegration and Pseudo-Independence. The Disintegration stage is characterized by the individual experiencing that denial no longer is sufficient to mask race, and results in bewilderment. The Pseudo-Independence phase is when an individual has a positive white view and begins to realistically appraise their whiteness.

The reoccurrence of social tourism can be viewed as an expedition for white students where they go out into the campus landscape collecting interracial, intercultural experiences. Ignorant and inauthentic whites can take these collections of experiences back to their comfort zones as experiential trophies demonstrating "support" of campus racial diversity. The key is the level of authenticity of the person and their purpose for participating in acts of social tourism. For example, this may be an inlet for some whites to begin developing personal mechanisms through which to discuss issues of race and privilege (antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Social tourism is a phenomenon that needs to be accounted for as on-campus

and off-campus programs are developed, implemented, and assessed because it can coopt programmatic goals.

At the intersection of theory and the participants' stories is an environment that maintains and objectifies racial/ethnic minorities as "other" through raced outreach projects and programs. Taking this into account, I propose the following points be considered for diversity, social justice, community outreach, and study abroad programs that provide students with the opportunity to engage people with different identities and cultural backgrounds:

- Proactive and Intentional Program Planning. Take active steps towards ensuring meaningful campus-wide educational and social experiences:
    - Hold quarterly or semi-annual campus programming meetings to promote interconnected activities and promote cumulative campus based learning experiences (Cole, 2007)
        - Provide staff and faculty moderated events
        - Utilize program goals as guides to ensure a set of experiences appear throughout the meetings driving conversations and interactions
    - Initiate a campus-wide online master calendar easily updated by departments and student groups accessible to all campus community members to download events via multiple technological platforms
- Set clear program objectives and learning outcomes.
    - Make available concisely written program objectives in multiple, easily accessible mediums that give 24-hour access to information for campus constituents who are away or unable attend a particular event

  - Reiterate the program purpose in all advertising materials as well as verbally at the start and end of each program to reinforce objectives and outcomes
  - When appropriate, utilize advisory groups as sounding boards for programmatic needs and objectives
- Establish a network of campus informants to understand how programs and departments are perceived by targeted student audiences (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Reason, Roosa Miller et al., 2005)
  - Acknowledge that the perceptions of target student audiences are their realities, and programs must work to reconcile those perceptions before proceeding with new programming. This requires that the campus community and racial climate be taken into consideration along with other mitigating circumstances such as departmental and programmatic history, previous administrators, etc.
- Intentionally develop programs and retool existing programs to explicitly counter the underpinnings of social tourism such as ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006) and epistemological ignorance (Mills, 1997):
  - Create an arc of programs that move from surface, introductory levels of social justice engagement to deeper conversations and activities centered on social justice issues
  - Engage with and train faculty, staff, and student leaders how to positively participate in social justice discussions and to counter social tourism
- Reinforce an inclusive campus (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Reason, Roosa Miller et al., 2005)
  - Engage the greater campus community in ways that are sustained, educative, and mutually beneficial

- Provide students with an archetype that reflects the institutional authenticity of being engaged with the surrounding community
- Counter social tourism so that individuals (particularly white students) do not develop a false sense of connection to off-campus racial/ethnic communities

As white students come to understand how to best support ethnic/racial minority students while maintaining a level of personal comfort, they are defining the sphere of influence in which they can make change. Institutionally, these experiences can serve as vehicles to problematize diversity related programming and policy. When white students who are intrinsically connected and motivated to issues of racial and social justice withdraw from direct involvement in the student groups they look to support, how can white students who have no intrinsic connection be expected to participate and support issues of racial and social justice? Rethinking diversity initiatives, programming, and dialogue should take place to re-center the institutional focus of diversity on issues of racial climate and social justice.

Institutional Climate, Culture, and Liberalism: Advertised & Experienced

SVC's (academic and institutional) literature and guiding mission statement specifically addressed the college's commitment to social justice, highlighting the value of diversity. With a stated institutional emphasis on diversity, the participant experiences provided a contradictory perspective that resulted in both the suppression and open expression of diverse ideas. The image of a diverse and liberal campus resulted in the redirection of conversations about topics not considered to be politically correct to underground forums similar to the backstage racialized performances described by Feagin (2007). The resonating example provided was the existence of campus subculture of honest and possibly ignorant conversations, which countered the debilitating mix of liberalism and political correctness stifling campus dialogues. The resulting

conversations were so choppy and disjointed that people were left searching for ways to express themselves, sometimes forgetting what they were discussing in the first place because of intense pressure to not offend anyone.

As an institution, SVC fell short of the day-to-day implementation of those core values of social justice and diversity. The espoused values (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kuh & Whitt, 1988) of SVC demonstrate what the institution holds as guiding principles, and include "seiz[ing] the opportunity to create and sustain conversations around the issues that matter most to [the campus community]" and creating a "culture of self-aware and rigorous critique, [through an] interdisciplinary approach." Influencing the values of the institution are larger forces such as systemic whiteness (Bell, 1992; Feagin, 2010), which is the integration of white values into the daily operations of society ranging from racial stereotypes to legislative measures designed to protect whiteness. Although Felix, Shilo, and Ronaldinho found these and other institutional values congruent with their own in deciding to attend SVC, the way the college implemented these values did not align with what students experienced day-to-day. The participants provided the pieces of a larger institutional picture that did not reflect those espoused values provided in the formal literature.

The dominance of a white, campus cultural identity or campus racial climate provided an environment in which ignorant white students did not believe that social justice education was necessary. I define campus racial climate as the backdrop of an institution that is based on dominant white norms and values which impact the decisions, assumptions, and perceptions of the day-to-day experiences of the campus community (Chang, 2002; Morgan, 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Questioning the relevance of social justice education carried over to campus survival tactics of r/e ms who clustered together in order to build communities of color. The

consistent denial and questioning of diversity-focused activities supporting students of color is one of many examples of how whites employ an epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997) in order to avoid acknowledging white privilege and racism. The consensus of participants seemed to be that mandating that more white students participate in r/e ms groups might have had noble undertones but could not be institutionalized. Considering that student involvement is defined as the "amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1999, p. 518), the participants believe that their peers will not devote the requisite amount of energy to make such a mandate beneficial to the campus community. Such a mandate would be volatile at best because of subsequent effects on r/e ms spaces, campus image concerns, and the likely unpreparedness and unwillingness of white students who would be shuttled into these unfamiliar and unwanted encounters.

As a result of the experiences and perspectives provided, I landed upon this question as a driver for my recommendations: Can open dialogues occur when confined by institutional cultures rooted in liberalism? Taking this question into consideration, I propose the following points be considered:

- Institutional Values – Do they represent the campus community?
    - Create an advisory board with multiple campus constituents including administration, faculty, staff, institutional support services, parents and students to annually revisit institutional values. A venue is provided for the voice of the campus to be heard by the upper level administrators
- Systematic and Periodic Assessment of Perceived Institutional Values
    - Utilize a mixed methods, longitudinal approach to capture the perceptions of the campus community

- Campus-wide survey
  - Build questions about espoused and enacted institutional values into the end of semester student evaluations and annual employee review procedures
- Individual and Focus Group Interviews
  - Use purposeful sampling of participants from all institutional levels including administration, faculty, staff, institutional support services, parents, and students to collect how the institution is perceived
  - Use interviews every other year to supplement the quantitative data and to avoid assessment burnout by participants

Providing all campus constituents with a voice can lead to a feeling of community and ownership in the campus institutional mission. Focused and institutionally specific assessment can provide decision makers and higher-level administrators with a sense of how constituents perceive the espoused versus enacted values of the institution. Continuous assessment helps the institution meet its goals, demonstrating accountability to stakeholders as well as providing an inclusive environment in which suggestions about adjustments to strategic plans and marketing materials can be made. Misalignment of values and negative perceptions can cause feelings of remorse for the campus community because expected diverse experiences are not being provided as anticipated.

The participants shared how they felt as consumers of campus literature, especially related to diversity, prior to their arrival at SVC and how those advertisements matched up with their experiences on campus. The touted liberal campus did not provide an open environment to engage in boundary spanning conversations but actually stifled open "liberal" dialogues and the exploration of ideas. The participants found that boundary spanning conversations and

intellectual exploration were hampered by the need to be politically correct and completely non-offensive in exchanges of any kind. They found an institutional disconnect between the promotion of diversity in campus literature and the underpinnings of systemic whiteness, which sought to minimize conversations that were deemed offensive or uncomfortable. Subcultures and "underground" venues began to form in order for these boundary-spanning conversations to take place without fear of social persecution. Formal spaces did exist on campus for students to engage in these discussions but were primarily focused on r/e ms groups, the Multicultural Hall was such a place that fostered these types of discussions and intellectual development.

Developing Diverse Networks and the Multicultural Hall

Developing campus connections and ultimately, collective campus involvement, should be goals of college campuses as the world continually becomes flatter and diverse (Friedman, 2007). Campus connections can form as students begin to expand their networks of diversity by increasing their exposure to diversity focused interactions inside and outside the classroom as well as through personal connections with fellow students. In particular, connections between communities of color and whites can lead to a breakdown of crippling racialized stereotypes and tensions (antonio, 2001, 2004; Chang, 2002; Cole, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Renn & Arnold, 2003). At SVC because of systemic whiteness, white students have the privileged choice to develop diverse networks without any repercussions to their academic experience. By attending a PWI, r/e ms do not have a choice about being categorized as other compared to white students they must continually work on developing diverse networks. I define diverse networks as the connections individuals make with groups of people and individuals who differ from themselves based multiple identities such as race, sexual orientation, gender, spirituality, etc. Creating and expanding diverse networks is important because the interactions provide individuals with

exposure to an array of (cultural, personal, professional) conversations, viewpoints, and narratives.

The Multicultural Hall at SVC was a venue that fostered impromptu and meaningful talks about race, gender, and social justice. This communal environment encouraged a culture of disclosure, intellectual boundary spanning, and exploration that did not exist outside the multicultural hall (Chang, 2002; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000) at SVC. Theme floors or halls provide r/e ms an area that is insulated from normative whiteness (Chang, 2002; Cole, 2007; Mayo, Murguia et al., 1995; Mitchell & Dell, 1992) promoting discussions amongst racial/ethnic minority students. Margaret, Ronaldinho, and Shilo shared that the hall became a space in which common cultural experiences, accomplishments, and frustrations could be shared. One of the main reasons for the depth of conversation was the insular nature of the hall and the social justice orientation of the participants residing there (Mayo, Murguia et al., 1995), which acted as a buffer against ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006) of the predominately white campus. Ontological expansiveness is "one of the predominant unconscious habits of white privilege… white people tend to act and think as if all spaces – whether geographical, physical, linguistic, economic, or otherwise – are or should be available to them to move in and out of as they wish" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 10). The application of ontological expansiveness means that whites operate from the viewpoint of ownership because they are entitled to access to all spaces. This belief often causes whites to speak out against r/e ms themed halls or spaces perceived to violate this entitled access, and employ epistemological ignorance to defend "color blind" worldviews, which are grounded in backstage racism (Picca & Feagin, 2007).

In addition to the recommendations for developing diverse networks, I propose that institutions that have a multicultural hall need to clearly convey the utility of the hall to the

campus community. Multicultural halls provide a space on campus in which a community of cultural support and understanding can develop, spiraling out into the larger campus community. Additionally, the value of the Multicultural Hall(s) on campus needs to be articulated to constituent groups such as parents, staff, and faculty. Demonstrate through memos, discussion groups, and online information with testimonials how multicultural halls can provide a community of support for r/e ms that increases their campus well being and can lead to a greater sense of connection to the institution.

Felix and Margaret talked about groups they were affiliated with and how they had friends who were members and leaders that urged them to join. For Margaret, being a leader of the Armenian student group became more like a friendship circle and cultural awareness/exchange circle than an actual activist or social movement focused group. Ronaldinho also joined groups where he had friends who were members, and also targeted groups in which he felt he could gain something such as meaningful discussion, action, or to simply meet new people. Shilo sought out being an active participant in the minority student campus culture. The expressed importance of finding a connection for these racially minded individuals was an integral part of their experiences, and the greater the bonds with diverse people on campus, the more likely the participants were invested in navigating challenging social situations.

As a result of being connected through a diverse network, the students were invested in their peers and the campus community. Their commitment to navigating challenging social situations allowed them to discuss difficult topics such as racism, whiteness, and oppression. Their commitment took the form of initially participating in r/e ms groups engaging in tough dialogues and placed them each in the role of other as a white person amongst people of color.

Understanding the literature, the value of campus diversity, and having heard the stories of these students, I believe that the campus can act as a vehicle for developing diverse networks and community conversations (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; DeTurk, 2006; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004; Rodenborg & Huynh, 2006). To do so, I propose that space has to be created in order to grow personal connections and subsequent exposure to situations involving interracial and diversity related content matter. The students' combined experiences lead me to recommend targeted programming and communication strategies that connect white students with peers, faculty, and staff across campus so that they can form a network of white social justice minded individuals (Astin, 1993; Milem, 1994). One tactic would be to intentionally create programs that bring diverse groups of students together to promote social situations where they can begin to forge connections (antonio, 2001). Programs could begin as small group activities focused across academic disciplines to solve problems and tasks that then create a pool of students for larger scale activities and get-togethers.

Intentionality of programming is a term I use to focus on forging meaningful connections between individuals with a sustained vision for change and community building. This can occur at multiple levels and be connected loosely or tightly, by moderating the intensity of exposure to issues of race, power, and privilege. Programs should intentionally focus on particular subsets of the campus community, such as a minority student group, to assist them with processing their personal dissonance. Multiple levels of programming should introduce the campus population to issues of diversity and social justice across the spectrum from large, general events to smaller, targeted, invitation only sessions meant to build up a core group of connected campus activists. Large-scale events like concerts, readings, and peacefully focused actions can be introductory

pathways for the general campus community. Smaller events can consist of one-on-one meetings building upon the aforementioned use of mixers and other forms of media to promote cross campus connections with social justice minded white individuals, and the addition of mentoring from and with multiple levels of campus citizens such as seasoned peers (whether first- or second-year peers who are a bit more acclimated to campus, third- and fourth-year plus students who have been involved with social justice issues). These relationships can provide guidance and role models for the invited students from people that have built up rapport and shared experiences (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).

An example of such a program is the McNair Scholar's Program through which cohorts of students from a range of racial and socio-economic backgrounds develop their research and socialization skill sets, and creates a pool of future mentors. Other supplemental low cost options to foster connections would be creating listservs, Twitter accounts, Facebook groups, and online academic groups through Blackboard, Angel, or other online service providers like Google. Conversely, an institutional financial commitment of at least one full-time position in an office of diversity focused on these efforts avoids localized departmental politics and budgetary constraints by being housed in a university-wide department. These activities on a broad, intense scale take financial and individual support.

I believe the institutional educational commitment to student academic experiences was a crucial piece of the participants' personal awareness and development (Astin, 1993; Milem, 1994). The exposure to social justice content in academic settings provided them with a foundation of knowledge and fueled their desire to participate in r/e ms groups (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Mu & Gnyawali, 2003; Reason, Roosa Miller et al., 2005). The knowledge demonstrated during our conversations was very impressive. It showed me that the

participants were well versed in literature and practiced articulating concepts in classroom conversations. Educational opportunities for the larger white campus community that focus on social justice activities to link up with a change in racial perspective are infrequent. There is a level of intensity missing for the majority of white students who take part in these diversity courses, trainings, and student group interactions (Helms, 1992). Allowing students to develop personal connections between contemporary issues of social justice and academic material should be a curricular goal (Mitchell & Dell, 1992).

With the goal of replicating what takes place in multicultural hall spaces such as deeper conversations and activities around social justice, conference rooms or community spaces can be provided in venues like the campus cultural center and student center. It is extremely vital to communicate that students of color are not racial identity instructors or conveyors of a raced experience meant to teach ignorant white folk. The challenge is how to replicate the experiences in other locations whether it is halls, quads, centers, etc.

Increasing White Student Participation – Challenges and Intentionality

The concept of "a lot of ice to break" came up during my conversation with Shilo about her white peers' reluctance to acknowledge their whiteness and issues of race. As we talked about those reluctant whites, I asked how breaking the ice could occur at SVC with campus wide programs and strategies to assist in tackling social justice issues through the increase of white student participation. We concluded, as Shilo noted, "real social ice breaking kind of has to happen on its own." It left me with the question; can campus wide programs positively confront ignorant, unprepared white students to think differently about issues of race and social justice? The intentional inclusion of whites into r/e ms groups on campus and safe havens for communities of color at a PWI such as theme floors or halls has disruptive and possibly volatile

consequences (Sullivan, 2006). I have come to see this conundrum as the Diversity Dilemma, which I describe as balancing racial inclusion, awareness, and activism. The dilemma is between the benefit of exposure, connections, and dialogue between diverse groups of students on campus AND being intentionally intimate and focused to promote intergroup connections.

Dissonance with one's own whiteness can be a major obstacle to being present and authentic as an ally and member of r/e ms groups (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Helms, 1992). At SVC, white participation in r/e ms groups is minimal, which some participants attributed to academics and busy schedules. Arguably, academic pursuits are the primary reason for college attendance but can become excuses for white students not participating. The way in which students choose to allocate their time demonstrates their personal values and commitments. Not making time to participate in r/e ms groups removes white students from the larger campus community and subsequent opportunities to confront and embrace their whiteness and privilege. It is important to note that alternate routes to interracial and social justice activities exist such as academic courses, friendship groups, faith-based groups, etc. which may be easier access points for white students engaging their racial identity.

Compounding the issue of minimal white student participation is the disruption of group dynamics resulting from an influx of unfamiliar, ignorant white people into any minority student group (Mills, 1997; Sullivan, 2006). It is important to note that the use of ignorant and ignorance when referring to white people is not a derogatory remark; ignorance is something that can be overcome with information and experience. College programs and administrators must remain sensitive to group dynamics. The participation of whites must be balanced to ensure diverse groups of students and perspectives are fostered (Chang, 2002; Hurtado, 1998) while being watchful that r/e ms groups do not approach saturation towards whiteness. I define saturation

towards whiteness as any r/e ms group that has absorbed so many white members that there is no longer a racial/ethnic minority majority and focus to the group (Feagin, 2010). The danger exists when spaces for r/e ms become just another white space in which r/e ms cannot be open and feel secure (Sullivan, 2006).

A problem is gaining participation of the majority of white students who have no connection to social justice issues and do not believe that race and racism exist (Helms, 1992; McIntosh, 2003). As several participants observed, it was hard to sell their peers on joining a group that was based upon the premise that whites were privileged. It also can seem somewhat remedial to those white students who strongly believe that they are well versed in literature and concepts of social justice, diversity and equity. I recommend establishing a campus-wide diversity and social justice awareness continuum in which multiple opportunities are presented on campus at three different knowledge levels: Interested, Aware, & Well-Versed. Providing programming and educative opportunities for students at three different levels of intensity casts a wider net for interaction and personally challenging points for students.

Programs could include performances about how to approach racially charged information and exposure to challenging issues, while conducting productive and beneficial difficult dialogues. Connecting the continuum and social justice efforts is important because it stresses to faculty, staff, and students that issues of social justice are highly valued on campus. Integrating social justice throughout the institution ideally requires buy in from all levels of the administration and faculty, but in reality will most likely be tied to champions in units and programs (Amey, 2007). Integration into the curriculum also allows different conversations to occur surrounding social justice theory and its application in any given academic discipline. Adding a training session on group dynamics for incoming classes could assist students in

navigating a new and diverse collegiate environment. Introductory training should be followed up with an annual refresher course provided in multiple mediums. Having participatory outlets such as a white student group for racial equity allows for diversity and equity minded white students to congregate (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005).

It is important for campuses to take an introspective and institutionally specific stance to decipher the risk versus reward of campus-wide racial participation mandates. Upon reaching a decision, possibly in conjunction with the institutional values assessment, the campus community may be better served to take a more strategic approach such as rolling out an assessment plan over one to two academic years. The goal should not be to eradicate whiteness because of inherent frustration and failure, but rather to chip away at epistemological ignorance and whiteness through a multipronged approach. The strategy may be to use continuums of social justice activity and intensity of the activity to help students achieve programmatic goals. For instance, a low intensity goal may be for the campus to have every student attend several racial/ethnic minority student events and campus sponsored diversity events or workshops throughout their academic career.

Conversely, a higher intensity goal may be prolonged exposure to issues of diversity and social justice such as an extended weekend retreat or multi-meeting cohort so that opportunities for individual moments of ice breaking can occur for white individuals. Reaching out to students, and particularly white students, with opportunities to confront issues of race, privilege, and social justice on their turf is more important as a first step. This can be done with seminars and hall-sponsored events where discussions can occur. Preparing the larger white campus population to discuss issues of race and privilege can help to avoid a flood of ignorant,

unprepared white students from invading r/e ms groups and potentially coming away with a negative experience.

Negotiating the dissonance can be trying for prepared individuals, so it begs the question, how do local resources of a college such as student group advisors, courses, and programs better prepare white students to deal with the racial dissonance, especially when they are not well prepared at the onset? To what extent can and do colleges/departments take time to help white students work through the dissonance? The participants did not always know what to do with the dissonance they experienced during interracial encounters and group activities. Minority students are more likely aware of themselves as racialized beings resulting from their day-to-day experiences within the American racial context. One of the issues here is how to prepare white students for what they might encounter when they see themselves as racial beings *without* using minority students as teaching tools and examples.

The task of assisting whites to work through their racial dissonance is complicated, at best, by the multi-directional racial pressures experienced by racially aware and social justice oriented whites. Taking these experiences into account demonstrates the difficulty of program planning focused on reaching white students who are unaware of their racial selves. Programmatic considerations include but are not limited to the following questions. Does there need to be a safe space for whites to confront whiteness? What does making the interrogation of whiteness a public event do to people who do not want to face the fact that they benefit from being white? Is a safe white space called public? What spaces are not safe for whites and whiteness? Is there such a thing as a safe space as long as racism and oppression exist?

A caveat for white participation on a larger scale is the ease with which white students can disengage from participating in communities of color into the fog of whiteness as cultural campus norms. This was seemingly the case for Shilo, Ronaldinho and Felix, who stopped participating in r/e ms groups even though they espoused values of diversity and social justice. If these engaged white individuals had difficulty remaining present in r/e ms groups, it makes the job of connecting with white students who did not have these issues on their radar even more challenging.

I want to stress a campus level intentionality with respect to the use of social justice programming versus an overarching mandate. Intentionality of programming demonstrates to the campus community that the institution truly supports social justice and inclusion efforts. Going beyond the inclusion of a diversity paragraph buried in an institutional mission statement serves as a hollow reminder about the campus' connection to and focus on issues of social justice and diversity. Intentionally focused messages and a robust arc of campus wide programming shows belief and follow through towards increasing the amount, intensity, and meaningfulness of interracial student participation.

Lingering Questions

Reflecting on these data, I am left with some lingering questions beyond the scope of this particular project that serve as a call for future research. The following are included to push knowledge production forward, encouraging a continued and progressively deeper dialogue inside and outside of academe:

- What is whiteness? What does it mean to white students, white administrators, white researchers? How does the definition differ from similarly situated communities of color on campus?

- How is whiteness reproduced by racially ignorant whites? By racially aware whites? By communities of color?
- How does campus culture affect the transmission of white guilt?
- How do faculty knowingly and unknowingly transmit white guilt through instances of acculturation and indoctrination inside the classroom?
- Does political correctness stifle or promote campus racial dialogues and understanding? Does a politically correct environment benefit a campus culture if it is perpetuated out of fear?
- How do self-labeled acts of liberalism serve as barriers to the interrogation of whiteness? How does liberalism differ from the mission of liberal arts colleges? Is it any different from political correctness? What are the differences in definition between the students and professional staff of the campus?

Future Research

This research project has only begun to explore the experiences of white social justice advocates with continued participation in racially and ethnically diversity campus settings. Future research should include research on difficult dialogues (Quaye, 2010) because challenging dialogues can act as deterrents for developing white social justice advocates. The present study (and others similarly situated) provides an opportunity to critically revisit the Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model stage model, updating it for the current racial and educational landscape, audiences, and climate. The utilization of Critical Race Studies (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, 2001) and expanding role of Critical White Studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) can add beneficial perspectives to Helms' model. Future, iterations of this line of inquiry should include Intersectionality Studies, which is defined by Cho, Williams

Crenshaw, & McCall (2013) as a way to approach research that investigates multiple identities like “gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines” (p. 787).

Additionally, I recommend that further studies investigate the influence of faculty and administration relations, the effects of rhetoric on campus racial climate perceptions, and how the physical campus environment impacts interracial interactions on campus. Future research should be sure to include white students who have a history of participating with r/e ms groups in addition to the Black Student Alliance. Research should continue to push dialogues around the definition of whiteness, whiteness studies, and issues of race, social justice and equity.

Limitations

I acknowledge that the data are not uniform and understand that this is because my study focused on human experiences and perspectives, which are not identical. Studying constructs such as race, privilege, and power can be messy. The aforementioned aspects of my study are really delimiters and not limitations. They are understood and anticipated parameters of my study versus an individual, methodological, or analytical shortcoming. I also accept and understand that the question and research perspective are situated deeply within critical and social just theories; my intent was not to generalize the findings but provide a portrait of each participant and their campus. These interactions, experiences, and subsequent proposals may provide lessons learned that are useful and transferrable to other readers, institutions, and programs.

EPILOGUE

Race is a central theme in my day to day. This research was prompted by my experiences growing up in Southern California and seeing how that set of experiences interacted with the world outside of the San Fernando Valley. This study has shown me that race is one of many facets and intersecting identities that contribute to the perceptions of folks throughout their lives. At the end of the study, I am able to reflect and see how this research project and process have changed me personally and professionally. Engaging in racially focused, social justice research blurred the lines between my personal and professional lives because of the constant iterative process of identifying and interrogating whiteness. I believe it is important to revisit my positionality and experiences within the research process. This epilogue is a place for me to reflect on the research journey unpacking a few topics such as my own whiteness, the personal researcher, contemporary connections, and looking forward.

Owning My Whiteness

The process of reconciling my whiteness is a constantly iterative process. I continue to acknowledge and grapple with the following (which is not an exhaustive list):

I am white (whatever that means).

I am raced.

I am privileged.

My continuing process of ownership has been extremely challenging, especially early on in my racial recognition as a person from a modest working class family in Southern California. It was difficult, at best, to see how coming from my family and neighborhood translated into a privileged existence. As I noted in the prologue, I had salient moments in my life in which my whiteness was a benefit or hindrance compared to my friends from racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Surprisingly, my process of whiteness ownership has had a ripple effect in my close social circles. These ripples have taken the shape of honest conversations and questions about race and racism all the way to complete denial of white privilege. Additionally, I have had my line of inquiry called into question and personal attacks leveled at me at gatherings and through social media. Through conversations with participants in my study, I was reminded that similarly raised white family members or people in the same friendship circles do not experience racialized events in identical ways. Although, the participants accumulated different experiences, being aware of their own whiteness and systemic privilege became a catalytic event moving them to become social justice advocates.

This was an important reaffirmation for me personally, as when I began my research on whiteness and privilege I encountered severe resistance followed by verbal and written attacks from childhood friends and family members defending their own whiteness. White denial is entrenched in my personal circles, severely damaging longtime friendships and costing me several other friendships. I return to my meeting with Felix when he told me how white people are not receptive to being told that they contribute to the maintenance of white privilege. Though the personal costs have been higher than I initially anticipated, the resistance and conflict to discussing white privilege has reiterated the importance of the research and need to continue to critique entrenched white privilege and racial preference.

The Personal Researcher

As this line of inquiry played out and a research agenda extends into a new phase, I work through the weight of whiteness. All the things that surround whiteness like its elusiveness, total denial, a history of oppression, a global colonial legacy, etc. make the process of researching whiteness challenging. The difficulty of the research process is compounded by my multiple

identities as an able bodied, white, heterosexual male from a lower middle class family. Engaging in Critical White Studies requires that I keep my identities and experiences as a person remaining transparent, authentic, and cautious. My motivations are often called into question by laypeople and academics alike as they try to assess who I am and what is the intent of my research. Questions are good things that can generate a dialogue about race, oppression, and privilege but a balance must be struck so that whiteness is not re-centered without candid and honest critique.

Race and my whiteness are constantly on my mind and shape my experiences from day to day. As my research(er) process has played out, I have become cognizant of the intersecting identities that can enhance and dampen racial awareness in individuals. I found that as the lines blurred for me between my academic and personal lives, I encountered increasing disapproval from a handful of individuals that were supportive of my doctoral pursuits. I found that they became extremely troubled by my research because it somehow implicated them as being complicit in white privilege. It also seemed to illuminate their whiteness in a way in which they were forced to confront their bubble of comfortable racial ignorance. They held tightly to the false notion of a colorblind society and existence of racial preferences.

As an optimistic budding researcher, I had high hopes for the amount of personal connection that my participants would have to my research topic. At times, I was frustrated that the students' commitment level did not always link up with my own in regards to completing the project. As a researcher, I had to realize that my participants may have been connected to social justice advocacy and other issues related to my research topic, but that did not mean that they were as invested in my research as I was. In addition to varying levels of commitment, I encountered multidirectional power dynamics in my research relationships with the participants.

Each research relationship became a balancing act where I tried to not exert undo influence and power because of my positionality while becoming aware of the power participants exercised throughout the process.

Contemporary Connections and Looking Forward

Conducting research and critiquing whiteness is relevant and necessary when considering the racially motivated events that recently transpired such as the George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin case, Paula Dean's admitted use of racial epitaphs, and the gutting of the Voters Rights Act by removing safe guards that protect racial/ethnic and lower socio-economic voters from being disenfranchised. The intensity of these racially motivated events sparked impromptu remarks by President Obama about the persistence of racism in our country and how he could have been Trayvon at any point in childhood.

The recent shift of covert racism in the aforementioned events reflects the persistence of backstage racism (Feagin, 2010) and systemic discrimination. This trend towards overt acts of racism and discrimination connect back to the murder of Oscar Grant, currently being portrayed in the movie, *Fruitvale Station*, racially motivated comments made by national radio host Don Imus, and the portrayal of President Obama as a Kenyan terrorist because of his familial lineage. The junction of this research project, historical events, and contemporary occurrences provide a vantage point to observe that racism, systemic white privilege, ontological expansiveness, epistemological ignorance, and the outright denial that racial discrimination by whites are still alive.

Even more troubling than this realization is that these discriminatory actions and beliefs are becoming more overt. It appears that whites across the country are becoming more cognizant that their majority status is coming to an end, and are beginning to mobilize socially and

politically to protect their systemic privileges. Simultaneously, the country is witnessing the increasing political power of racial/ethnic minorities and an increasingly energized and politicized racial/ethnic minority youth pushing for equitable reforms. Whiteness is a complicated construct because it carries a stigma that makes it a taboo topic in white circles to honestly engage. Still, I am optimistic that positive strides are being made towards equality but I acknowledge that whites will not relinquish their positionality and privilege willingly. In order to disrupt racial oppression, it requires continuous interrogation and resistance to the systemic nature of whiteness, privilege, and marginalization. I look to continue pushing the conversation in academic, professional, and personal venues. An honest dialogue makes folks uncomfortable at times is better than complicit silence which contributes to ongoing oppression.

APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself
2. We are going to be talking a lot about your college experiences, but to understand the present I'm also interested in learning what it was like for you in school before you came to college. Describe what going to [elementary, junior high, high] school was like for you.
    a. Elementary
        - Tell me what you remember about being in elementary school. Who were your friends and what kinds of things did you do together in and out of school?
        - Did you have experiences of difference?
    b. Junior High School
        - Tell me what you remember about being in junior high school. Who did you hang with, what types of things did you do when you hung out?
        - Did you take part in any on campus student groups?
        - Did you have experiences of difference?
    c. High School
        - Tell me what you remember about being in high school.
        - Who did you hang with, what types of things did you do when you hung out?
        - Did you take part in any on campus student groups?
        - Did you have experiences of difference?
3. Looking back over your experiences in school, do any moments come to mind that you now see as being essential in defining or forming who you are as a person?

4. In addition to your school related stories, can you recall and describe a moment or a few moments in your life that you now look back upon as pivotal in being cognizant of difference?
5. Taking all of the things that we talked about so far into account, when did your sense of self and your sense of difference intersect and become one?
6. Please tell me how your experiences with school and difference have changed now that you are attending college.
7. So now in college, what student groups are you a member of?
    a. How did you find out about the group [this group]?
    b. Why did you end up joining it [this group]? Was the purpose of the group a reason you became a member? [this is really a follow-up to why did you join]
    c. What's it like to be a member of this group?
8. Having discussed your membership in these non-White student groups, what are the benefits that you have found as a result of your membership?
9. **DRAW PICTURE** – Think about the first time you attended [the group] meeting. Please draw me a picture of what you experienced. Please describe what you have drawn.
    a. Describe what it is like for you to be amongst members of [this group].
    b. How does your experience in the group you have drawn above compare with your experiences in other groups that you are a member of?
10. Can you talk about what your process of working through difference has been like for you?
11. As a college student, describe how you feel among peers who identify as racially or ethnically similar to yourself.

a. Do you feel any different now than when you did when you were in elementary, junior high or high school?

12. You've joined this group and seem to be getting a lot out of it [assuming this is what they say]. Why do you think others are not joining? What, if anything, do you think the university could do to encourage more participation?
13. What do you think about encouraging more white students to participate in non-white student groups as you have?
14. Before we end our discussion, is there anything else that you think I should know about your experiences in non-white student groups here on campus?

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