

WHITE COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO CAN “SEE” THEIR OWN RACE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW ADULT LEARNERS AND TRADITIONAL
STUDENTS DESCRIBED RACE AND RACISM AT MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

By

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ABSTRACT

WHITE COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO CAN “SEE” THEIR OWN RACE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW ADULT LEARNERS AND TRADITIONAL STUDENTS DESCRIBED RACE AND RACISM AT MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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The American college classroom is projected to become more racially and ethnically diverse, which is consistent with the vision and ideals of higher education. However research shows that White students, who represent the largest racial group currently on campuses, are unable to recognize themselves as having a race, do not understand the privilege associated with being White, and fail to grasp the prevalence of racism. Colleges and universities need to better understand how White students interpret and make sense of their own race in order to fulfill their missions of encouraging respect for diversity and preparing students to become engaged citizens in a democratic and global society. The purpose of the current study was to determine how White students at Midwestern University who could “see” their own race (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003) explained their understanding and experiences of race in light of the changing racial landscape of the American university and country. Further, this study examined the educational and non-educational experiences that caused White students to perceive or reflect upon the meaning of their own race, some for the first time.

The research informing this study occurred at Midwestern University, chosen for its location in Metropolitan Detroit—which was noted as the most segregated urban area in the United States. Ten students were selected for this qualitative study based on their responses to the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale – Revised (ORAS-R), one of the few tools available to measure the racial consciousness of White persons. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each student. Analysis of audio recordings and transcripts revealed four themes.

White college students' directly described their experiences of being White, and talked about struggling to identify the privileges associated with their race. Additionally, students expressed a desire to discuss race, but lacked the ability and confidence to do so while on and away from campus. Students talked about racism, but were unaware of its causes and far-reaching effects.

Despite living in the most racially diverse era for higher education and the United States, findings in this study supported existing literature that White college students have deep awkwardness and discomfort when discussing race and hold many inaccurate and uninformed ideas about race, White privilege, and racism. Half of the students in this study said they did not actively or frequently reflect on or notice their race, and none spoke in an outright positive manner or with pride about their race. Participants engaged fully in the interviews, but acknowledged they did not always feel capable of doing so while on campus or in their lives away from campus.

Findings from this study have implications for practice and policy in higher education. Students need supportive campus spaces in order for conversation on race to be effective. Educators and student affairs professionals need to be skilled in working across the many facets of identity in White populations (e.g., age, social, racial, ethnic, sexual, gender and gender identity, etc.) to provide such educational spaces. Students need practice with real-world strategies and tactics to disrupt racial jokes, slurs, and stereotypes when these are voiced on and off campus. Intentional, required, ongoing and well-facilitated campus experiences dedicated to understanding race are needed. Related to policy, educational administrators of both K-12 and postsecondary institutions must commit to requiring all students to participate in high-quality multicultural educational experiences. Sharing real and meaningful data about admissions and funding processes with students before, during, and after they are enrolled will help uncover larger social justice issues within education.

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This dissertation is dedicated to first generation college students.
It will be difficult, and it will be worth it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| LIST OF TABLES | xii |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY | 1 |
| Historical to Present Demographics of American College Students..... | 3 |
| Diversity as a Desired Outcome of Higher Education | 5 |
| White Racial Identity Development and Higher Education..... | 7 |
| Racial Attitudes of White College Students..... | 8 |
| Research Problem..... | 9 |
| Purpose and Research Questions..... | 11 |
| Definitions | 12 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 12 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW | 14 |
| Conceptual Framework | 14 |
| College Student Development Theory | 15 |
| White Racial Identity..... | 16 |
| Definition of terms..... | 16 |
| History..... | 17 |
| Models of White Racial Identity Theory..... | 18 |
| Helms. | 19 |
| Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson’s White Racial Consciousness Model. | 23 |
| Intersectional Theory and Holistic Approaches to Racial Identity Development. | 28 |
| Whiteness Studies | 30 |
| Defining Whiteness Studies..... | 31 |
| The History of Whiteness Studies | 32 |
| First wave of Whiteness studies..... | 33 |
| Second wave of Whiteness studies | 33 |
| Third wave of Whiteness studies | 36 |
| Notable Contributions to the Field of Whiteness Studies..... | 37 |
| Ruth Frankenberg..... | 38 |
| Peggy McIntosh | 39 |
| David Roediger | 40 |
| Themes in the Research..... | 41 |
| Whiteness as the norm | 41 |
| Low degree of self-awareness..... | 41 |
| Feelings of culturelessness | 42 |
| Difficulty in explaining Whiteness | 43 |
| Whiteness as normal..... | 44 |
| Whiteness as Privilege | 45 |
| Whiteness as a social construction..... | 46 |
| Refuting race as not biologically based..... | 46 |
| The changing definition of race | 47 |
| Race as a control mechanism | 48 |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Color-blindness as the new racism..... | 48 |
| Racial groups receive privileges based on merit. | 49 |
| Most people do not care about or pay attention to race..... | 50 |
| Patterns of social inequity are the result of cultural deficits of individuals or racial/ethnic groups..... | 51 |
| No systematic attention needs to be given to any existing inequities | 52 |
| Gaps and criticisms of research on Whiteness | 54 |
| The Future of Whiteness Studies..... | 56 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 58 |
| | |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY | 59 |
| Knowledge Claims | 59 |
| Constructivist Paradigm | 60 |
| Relativism Ontology..... | 60 |
| Subjectivist Epistemology | 61 |
| Qualitative Methodology..... | 62 |
| Strategy of Inquiry | 63 |
| Research Questions | 63 |
| Methods..... | 64 |
| Background and Role of Researcher | 64 |
| Procedures for Data Collection..... | 67 |
| Site selection. | 68 |
| Participant selection..... | 69 |
| Types of data collected: Interviews | 70 |
| Procedures for Data Recording..... | 74 |
| Data Analysis and Interpretation | 76 |
| Validating the Accuracy of Findings..... | 78 |
| Credibility | 78 |
| Transferability..... | 79 |
| Dependability..... | 80 |
| Confirmability..... | 81 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 81 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FOUR: BACKGROUND INFORMATION | 83 |
| Abigail..... | 84 |
| April | 86 |
| Faith..... | 89 |
| John | 91 |
| Kimberly..... | 92 |
| Macy..... | 94 |
| Marianne..... | 96 |
| Monroe | 97 |
| Rachel..... | 100 |
| Wayne..... | 101 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER FIVE: BEING WHITE AND SEEING WHITE | 105 |
| What Does it Mean to be White? | 105 |
| How Participants Described Being White | 106 |
| “I don’t think about it” | 106 |
| Being White is ordinary. | 107 |
| I’m not White, I’m _____ | 108 |
| The Advantages and Disadvantages of Being White | 111 |
| Advantages of being White..... | 111 |
| Not being judged for their race | 112 |
| Viewing White as being effortlessly powerful..... | 114 |
| Disadvantages of being White. | 116 |
| Whites are overlooked for resources | 116 |
| Money | 117 |
| Scholarships..... | 120 |
| Admissions processes | 121 |
| Negative White stereotypes..... | 123 |
| Prejudice and intolerance..... | 124 |
| Gender and socioeconomic status..... | 124 |
| Factors that Influenced Participants’ Definition of Whiteness..... | 126 |
| Family | 126 |
| Non-judgmental interest in race and equality | 126 |
| Family members teaching about differences..... | 128 |
| Neighborhoods and schools before college | 130 |
| Experiences That Helped White College Students “See” Their Own Race..... | 132 |
| Overall Experience at a “Diverse” Campus | 133 |
| In-class and on-campus experiences..... | 138 |
| Classroom experiences..... | 138 |
| Cocurricular experiences | 147 |
| Hearing the Stories of Persons of Color | 149 |
| Being in a Group or Situation that is Not White | 153 |
| Experience with Another Element of Identity | 158 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 162 |
| | |
| CHAPTER SIX: DESIRE TO DISCUSS RACE AND RACISM | 164 |
| Desire and Ability to Discuss Race..... | 164 |
| Midwestern University: “A Special Kind of Bubble” | 165 |
| Sketches of Students Eager to Discuss Race | 166 |
| Factors that Prevent/Inhibit White Students from Discussing Race | 172 |
| Whites need to be “forced to” talk about race | 173 |
| Friends and family members..... | 174 |
| Power Differentials | 177 |
| Participants’ Awareness of Racism..... | 183 |
| Definitions of Racism..... | 183 |
| Causes of Racism..... | 185 |
| Reactions to Living in Metropolitan Detroit | 187 |
| The Future..... | 190 |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Chapter Summary..... | 193 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 194 |
| Being White..... | 195 |
| Disfluencies in Speech and Semantic Moves..... | 195 |
| White as Invisible and Ordinary..... | 200 |
| Efforts to Distance Themselves from Being White..... | 202 |
| Advantages and Disadvantages of Being White..... | 203 |
| Not personally experiencing the advantages of Whiteness..... | 204 |
| Whites think they are overlooked for resources | 205 |
| Experiences with Family and Neighborhoods Before College | 207 |
| Seeing White | 209 |
| Is Midwestern University Really a “Diverse” Campus? | 210 |
| Curricular and Cocurricular Experiences that Caused White Students to “See” Their Race | 213 |
| Hearing the Stories of Persons of Color | 214 |
| Being in a Group or Situation that is Not White | 216 |
| Experiences with Another Element of Identity: Gender | 217 |
| Experiences with Another Element of Identity: Age..... | 218 |
| Desire and Ability to Discuss Race..... | 219 |
| Midwestern University was a Safe Environment | 220 |
| Students Eager to Discuss Race..... | 221 |
| Factors that Prevented/Inhibited White Students from Discussing Race | 223 |
| Whites need to be forced to talk about race..... | 223 |
| Friends and family members..... | 224 |
| Power Differentials | 226 |
| Seeing Racism..... | 227 |
| Limitations | 230 |
| Implications..... | 231 |
| Implications for Practice..... | 232 |
| Implications for Policy | 236 |
| Areas for Future Research..... | 238 |
| APPENDICES | 240 |
| APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol | 241 |
| APPENDIX B: Invitations to Participate | 243 |
| APPENDIX C: Research Participant Information and Consent Form..... | 248 |
| APPENDIX D: Summary Table of Study Participants | 249 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 250 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 1: Summary Table of Participants | 104 |
| Table 2: Summary Table of Study Participants. | 249 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This first chapter explains the purpose of the current study, which examined how White students at Midwestern University discussed their own experiences of race while in college. Major demographic changes are occurring in the United States. In comparison to the population of the late 1950s, the “U.S. is getting bigger, older, and more diverse” (Scommenga, 2004). U.S. Census Bureau statistics confirm these changes and predict these trends will continue: By the year 2050, the population is expected to grow 42% to approximately 439 million people; by 2030, it is projected roughly 1 in 5 people will be over the age of 65; and racial/ethnic minority groups (i.e., named as those outside of the non-Hispanic White population) in the U.S. will become the majority group by the year 2042 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). These shifts in the populace will affect many aspects of American society, including higher education.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects the number of students attending college will increase through at least Fall 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Historically, Whites have been the largest racial group participating in higher education, and continue to represent the majority of students enrolled in college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Yet, as students attend American campuses today, they do so as the most racially and ethnically diverse group to enter higher education—with expectations this trend will continue (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a). Although postsecondary institutions have mission statements promoting diversity as a desired outcome and essential component of becoming an educated person (Gurin, 1999), the majority of White students enter college from segregated schools and neighborhoods, unable to identify themselves as having a race (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003; Pryor, DeAngelo, Blake, Hurtado, & Tran, 2011; Tatum, 2003). Recent studies have shown traditional aged White college students expressing

increased racial prejudice as well as concerted efforts to avoid appearing racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007). The majority of students in higher education today are White and do not realize they have a race, which presents an important problem for leaders in higher education because it means that a large number of college students are both engaging in knowingly racist behaviors and also unconsciously discriminatory manners. White students' lack of racial understanding results in tension on campus, diminishes learning for all students, and surfaces in a range of behaviors from microaggressions to overt acts of disrespect. Without intervention, White students leave their universities with degrees in hand, but without an understanding of the privilege and power they have racially and how this affects persons of Color. In order to fulfill their missions of encouraging respect for diversity and preparing students to become engaged citizens in a democratic and global society, colleges and universities need to better understand how White students interpret and make sense of their own race. The purpose of the current study is to determine how White students make sense of their own race in light of the changing landscape of the American university and country.

The first chapter introduces the current study. Included in this chapter is an overview of the key areas that influence the research problem, statement of the research problem, purpose and research questions, and definitions of key terms. In order to understand the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race, the following four topics were reviewed to open the chapter: historical to present demographics of American college students, diversity as a desired outcome of higher education, White racial identity development and higher education, and the racial attitudes of White college students.

Historical to Present Demographics of American College Students

The history of higher education in the United States can be characterized chiefly by expansion but conversely by exclusion. The first American colleges appeared in the mid-1600s and were patterned on England's Oxford and Cambridge (Altbach, 2001). These small colleges welcomed White males only and were largely out of reach for anyone but the "colonial elite" (Thelin, 2004, p. 25). Anderson (2002) noted that the growth of higher education in the U.S. in fact "paralleled the evolution of a national system of racially qualified slavery and its attendant ideologies of racism and class subordination" (p. 3). African Americans began to experience higher education after the Civil War, and their participation was largely in private institutions exclusively for Black students—a trend that extended through World War II (Anderson, 2002). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (more commonly referred to as the "GI Bill") of 1944 had little impact on the enrollment of persons of Color or women, but did expand access to more White males across socioeconomic lines (Thelin, 2004). These veterans returning from war and military service represented a male population that was older than the traditional 18-year old student who typically entered college right after high school. Although White women slowly began to appear in public colleges as of the early 1900s, students of Color did not do so until after the Civil Rights Movement almost 60 years later when African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Asian American students enrolled in colleges and universities in significant numbers (Anderson, 2002; Geiger, 2005). Educational statistics showing the enrollment at postsecondary institutions during this time period report the ages of college students in categories as follows: 18-19, 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 (NCES, 2014a). There are conflicting reports about whether or not higher education was welcoming to students over the age of 25 historically, with some researchers indicating that American colleges and universities

have had offerings for adult learners dating back to the Morrill Act of 1862 (Kasworm, 2012) and others suggesting that older students and veterans were in fact merely “tolerated” with little or no significant accommodations to meet the needs of this population (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2011, p.328). While the overall story of American higher education is one of expanding access and enrollment, the majority of higher education institutions in the U.S. have become more diverse across racial/ethnic and age categories just in the last 40 years.

A comparison of enrollment in postsecondary institutions in the mid-1970s and 2010 revealed how much the race/ethnicity of students in American college classrooms has changed. Postsecondary enrollment has increased over 40% with more than 21 million students attending degree-granting institutions as of Fall 2010 compared to only about half that number (11 million students) in 1976 (NCES, 2011b). While the percentage of students of Color has increased across all categories, White students still represent the majority of students in higher education. However, White students are the only racial/ethnic group that has decreased in percentage between 1976 and 2010 – a reduction of 22% (NCES, 2011b). Students of Color have increased their college-going percentages as follows from 1976 to 2010: Black students comprise 14.5% of the total college population—an increase of 5% since 1976; Hispanic students have increased 9.5% to become 13.0% of all students enrolled; Asian Pacific Islanders have increased their numbers by 4.3% to 6.1% of enrollment, and American Indian/Alaska Natives have increased by 0.2% to represent 0.9% of students in college (NCES, 2011b). Since the mid-1970s, the percentage of White students participating in higher education has steadily decreased while the proportion of students of Color has consistently increased.

The percentage of persons aged 25 to 34 enrolled in American postsecondary education has also increased over the last several decades. In 1975, only 10.1% of the population who

were 25 to 29 years old were enrolled in colleges, universities, or professional schools. By 2010, that percentage had increased to 14.6 % of the population. Comparatively, for persons 30-34 years old, the percentages were 6.6 % in 1975 and 8.3 % in 2010 (NCES, 2014a). A significant portion of the college student population is considered non-traditionally aged, with over 39% of students in 2010 age 25 and older. Enrollment for students 25 to 34 years of age is projected to increase by 20 % between 2010 and 2021. Similarly, students 35 years old and over are projected to increase by 25 % between 2010 and 2021 (Hussar and Bailey, 2013). Referred to collectively as adult learners or non-traditional students, persons over the age of 25 look to be a group of students who will continue to be a sizable population on university and college campuses in the United States.

Diversity as a Desired Outcome of Higher Education

Although postsecondary institutions vary in size, type, and purpose, they often have stated missions promoting diversity as an essential component of becoming an educated person and share the value of pluralism with related verbiage in their admissions policies and diversity statements. University presidents have written about the importance of higher education outcomes that help students to better understand the perspectives of a variety of people through interactions with them, to reflect that understanding through engagement in civic and democratic processes, and to advocate for social justice (Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000; Rhodes, 2001; Tatum, 2007). The benefits and positive effects of college students interacting with diverse groups through multicultural curricular and cocurricular experiences are well documented by the landmark research of Gurin (1999) with similar findings in recent studies and theoretical writings (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; King & Magolda, 2005; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Encouraging cross-cultural interaction and

expanding students' understanding and communication skills with a broad variety of people is a fundamental and intended outcome of higher education for many administrators.

Despite these stated intentions, there is evidence America's colleges and university campuses are not places where diversity is revered by the largest racial group of students. Recent studies of White students' attitudes and behaviors while in college provide examples of their inability to recognize themselves as having a race, the belief that reverse discrimination happens commonly, and acts of overt racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; McKinney, 2005; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Incidents occur daily on American campuses that demonstrate the need for practitioners and leaders in higher education to learn more about how students make sense of their own race—particularly White students who hold the majority status. The postsecondary goal of embracing and valuing diversity can seem impossible to achieve when faced with events like the video depicting members of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at the University of Oklahoma singing racial slurs and statements that the organization would never admit Black members, or the annual "Increase Diversity Bake Sale" hosted by the Berkeley College Republicans and other similar groups, or the examples of hate speech graffiti or nooses appearing on campuses across the United States each semester (Berrett, 2015; Chau, 2012; "Controversial Bake Sale," 2011; Kim, 2012). Racial tensions were evident on several campuses as students protested the re-election of President Barrack Obama with university administrators acknowledging gatherings where "racial epithets" and "uncivil language" were used, in one case toward the members of a Minority Student Union house ("An Open Letter", 2012; "A Message From", 2012; "Message from President Howard, 2012). There is evidence White college students do not necessarily agree with the value of diversity despite the current statements, programming, and administrative efforts within higher education. The current study provides

insight about the experiences and circumstances that caused several White students at Midwestern University to be able to *see* their race and how they perceived being White.

White Racial Identity Development and Higher Education

The study of racial identity development in the United States began in earnest after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Researchers sought explanations for how African Americans responded to these transformative times that challenged and exposed racism (Jackson, 2001). The idea White people had a racial identity that could change and develop was not studied until several decades later when Hardiman (1982) completed a doctoral dissertation on White racial consciousness and suggested a model for describing the process for a “healthy racial identity in Whites” (p. vi). Throughout the 1980s, Helms studied racial identity in the context of counseling psychology and made a foundational contribution to the field with her book, *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice* (1993). Helms defined “racial identity” as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). As a field of study, college student development relies heavily on research in education, sociology, psychology, and other social sciences to describe the growth and evolution of learners from a number of perspectives. Helms’s research on racial identity theory is frequently cited by researchers studying how college students identify and interpret race.

There is a gap in the literature about how White people experience and develop their racial identity while participating in higher education. Several authors identify the need for more empirical research on how students’ perceptions of racial and ethnic identity changes while in college, as the body of knowledge available is described as small and largely theoretical (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Phinney, 2005). White identity models are limited; fail to

account for factors such as gender, social class, and sexual orientation; use methods that evoke participants to focus on “the other” instead of their own experiences as White persons; and do not connect theory with practice for the student affairs profession (Chesler et al., 2003; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Several authors note a dearth of qualitative studies related to students’ openness to diversity, experiences with race and racial climate, and racism on college campuses (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). The current study contributes to this identified need and also to the emerging field of Whiteness studies. A number of researchers and academics cite the need to examine Whiteness and White privilege, its oppressive structure within societal institutions such as higher education, and the policies affecting and created for these spaces—such as affirmative action (McKinney, 2005; Owen, 2011; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Pierce, 2003). As postsecondary institutions endeavor to prepare students to work and live in global society, there is much evidence further research concerning White students and their perceptions of race is needed.

Racial Attitudes of White College Students

Despite the efforts of higher education institutions to explain the benefits of living in the most diverse times in United States history, contemporary White college students have not shown they understand or value this philosophy. White college students choose to socialize primarily with peers of the same race (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Further, millennial college students appear to be less concerned with race relations than students in years past, are more “self-focused” and “narcissistic” (Bourke & Mechler, 2010, p. 4), and are unaware of their own identity and the pervasiveness of Whiteness on campus and in society (Chesler et al., 2003). A body of literature suggests White college students have adopted a politically

correct “colorblind” attitude toward race in public “front stage” settings, but then behave in racist ways in private “backstage” areas (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007). These studies provide numerous examples of White college students demonstrating markedly racist behaviors when in homogenous, White groups and then behaving in more socially accepted ways in mixed race groupings or in public.

More research is needed about the experiences of White students to inform those working in higher education and to enable student affairs practitioners to create suitable and effective programming for this population. The current study examined how White students interpreted their own race during their experience in college. Particular emphasis was placed on interviewing students who demonstrated a consciousness or understanding of being White, with the researcher inquiring about the events and experiences that may have caused these students to become aware of their own race.

Research Problem

There are many opinions about the main purpose and objective of postsecondary education in the present-day United States and as many ideas about how to achieve those goals. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2008) suggested the following outcomes as essential:

To provide graduates and the nation at large with the skills needed to be effective in a global, increasingly competitive economy, in which corporations reach across nations and geographical divides in search of new markets, more efficient production, and less costly labor; and to close the achievement gap between those students in this country who are advantaged—educationally, culturally, and economically—and those who are not.

(Wegner, p.1)

Neither of these outcomes will be achieved if the racial majority of students on campus are unable to recognize and understand their own race and how race affects their thoughts, actions, perspectives, relationships, and all ways of being. Within the research literature related to colleges and universities, a review of recent publications reveals a body of knowledge about the wide-ranging benefits of diversity for students in college settings. Topics range from the composition of campuses and classrooms (Denson & Chang, 2009; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund & Parente, 2011), to curriculum that focuses on racial identity (Tatum, 2011), to curricular formation focused on equity (Mayhew, Grunwald, & Day, 2011; Maurill, 2011; Slaughter, 2011). If the American postsecondary goal is to affect contemporary White students so they respect persons of all cultures as well as recognize privilege and racism, more must be known about how the racial identity of this population of students develops while they progress through higher education. McKinney (2005) addresses the inefficiency of using old “models for combating racism devised for the parents and grandparents of young Whites” (p.223).

Practitioners and educators must learn more about present White students’ beliefs about their race in order to develop relevant and effective interventions and programming at the college level, which will help achieve the goals of preparing students for a more globalized society and closing the achievement gap.

Most importantly, the current study contributes to an area of research that is needed to advocate for social justice in higher education. While access to postsecondary education for students of Color has increased substantially since the Civil Rights movement, enrollment figures and mission statements that promote diversity demonstrate a very basic level of commitment by the academy. Present day American colleges and universities are overwhelmingly White domains when considering both the faculty and staff who oversee these

spaces as well as the students who move through and graduate from these institutions. From the halls of higher education, graduates move on to become leaders at all levels of society. Equality has not been achieved. Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) noted that “To ignore White ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it” (p. 217). Indeed, White students need curriculum and experiences that help them perceive and confront the privilege and oppression that operate at so many levels within their campuses and in larger society.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was to learn how White students involved in postsecondary education interpret their own race. Further, this study examined the educational and non-educational experiences that caused White students to perceive or reflect upon the meaning of their own race, some for the first time.

The research questions that shaped the current study included:

1. What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race?
2. For White college students who can “see” their own race, what events led to this occurrence? (Chesler et al., 2003).

The following sub-questions were used in conjunction with the questions above:

- What does it mean to White college students to be White? (e.g., How do White college students describe their experiences of race?)
- What do these students believe has shaped their ideas about race? (e.g., What types of educational and other experiences affect how White college students view their own race?)

Definitions

The current consensus among scholars in the field of social sciences is that *race* is largely a socially constructed phenomenon. Omi and Winant (1994) stated, “Indeed, the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise and at worst completely arbitrary” (p. 55). Andersen and Collins (2007) explained “the meaning and significance of race stems from specific, historical, and political contexts” (p. 70) and these meanings are constantly “shifting” (p. 71). These statements reveal the fluidity of race. The focus of the current study was to discover how White college students who could see their own race defined being *White*. I asked students who identified themselves as White to explain their definition and understanding of that term.

Since African Americans were the first population for which racial identity models were researched and developed, this racial grouping is discussed in the current study. While reviewing source material for this research project, the terms *Black* and *African American* were sometimes used with specific historical connotations and at other times used interchangeably. The terms *Black*, *Blacks*, *White*, and *Whites* were used in the literature sometimes capitalized and at times used with a lower case “b” and “w”. For the current study, the terms used to refer to all racial and ethnic groups are capitalized as prescribed by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010). Also in accordance with the APA guidelines on preferred usage for “North American people of African ancestry” (p.75), the terms *Black* and *African American* were used interchangeably throughout this study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One provided an overview of the current study, which examined the perceptions White college students had of their own race. The American college classroom is projected to

become more racially and ethnically diverse, which is consistent with the vision and ideals of higher education. However, White students, who represent the largest racial group currently on campuses, have interacted very infrequently if at all with persons of Color before entering college. The current study explored how White students at Midwestern University explained their understanding and experiences of race while in college.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Race has always been a force shaping the development of the United States. Within higher education, the racial composition of students, faculty, and staff has gradually progressed from completely homogenous to at least representative of all races, but not yet to equity. Many educational entities, such as the Department of Education, the American Council on Education, and the Lumina Foundation, list as their foci expanding and increasing access to higher education, as well as advancing diversity and promoting globalization on college and university campuses. Despite these ideals privilege, oppression, and racism are present in American postsecondary education (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; McKinney, 2005; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Waters, 2007) and restrict colleges and universities from achieving their stated missions of promoting equity. In order to realize and achieve visions of inclusiveness, higher education practitioners working with students must explore and understand how the majority group of students makes meaning of their own race. The current study contributes to an area of research that needs more investigation.

Conceptual Framework

Several bodies of literature are available to inform the current study. Creswell (2003) suggests using a “theoretical lens or perspective” can assist researchers in considering significant questions and standpoints (p. 131). The conceptual framework for this study addresses two main areas of research: college student development theory and the field of Whiteness studies. Within the field of college student development, the subcategory of White racial identity development is discussed with a focus on three key theories: Janet Helms’s model of White Racial Identity Development; the White Racial Consciousness Model developed by Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994); and several recent holistic development theories. Areas that are

discussed related to the field of Whiteness studies include an overview and history of the field, notable contributors as well as criticisms, themes and gaps in the literature, and a conceptualization of the future of this emerging area. Both college student development theory and Whiteness studies provide a foundation from which to study how contemporary White college students interpret their own race.

College Student Development Theory

Human beings grow, develop, and change constantly. The study of this process for persons participating in higher education constitutes a large body of research and theoretical writing called college student development theory. This field “examines ways in which students and other adults make meaning of their experiences and how faculty and administrators can promote their learning, growth, and development” (Wilson & Wolf-Wendel, 2005, xv). Humans develop rapidly during adolescence, and the bulk of the historical work in the field focuses on students under the age of 24 years old who are generally referred to as traditional age students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Advances in the fields of psychology and sociology set the stage for the explosion of research that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s involving college settings and students (Evans et al., 2010). Conceptualizing the broad field of college student development as divided into categories or “families” of theories is a helpful way to examine this research. These families include: psychosocial development, cognitive-structural development, and development of social identities (Wilson & Wolf-Wendel, 2005). Various models within each of these families attempt to explain the multitude of processes through which students grow and develop in their post-secondary years. The current study is focused within the category of social identity development, with an examination of select research on how White students develop their racial identity.

White Racial Identity

The next section outlines the challenges of defining vocabulary that is used in the current study, particularly related to White racial identity. A common understanding of terms is established. While reviewing the literature related to racial identity development of White students, the shortage of studies was noted. This need for more information about how White students interpret their racial identity throughout their lifespan is examined along with specific areas where studies have been suggested by researchers and practitioners in the field.

Definition of terms. Due to the limited amount of research in the college student development field on White racial identity, it was necessary to examine information from other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, counseling, and education to inform this study. Anthropologists, historians, and researchers have argued race is a “meaningless” and inaccurate way to categorize people because there is little if any evidence that distinguishes race at the biological or human gene level (Fears, 2003; Hartman, 2004; Helms, 2008; Kolchin, 2002; Owen, 2011; Painter, 2012). Instead, race is acknowledged by many modern scholars as a socially constructed phenomenon. To help explicate the meaning of race for this study, two definitions are helpful. A traditional definition of race is: “Ancestry and selected physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape” (Weber, 2001, 19). The definition offered by Omi and Winant (1994) expands the perspective beyond physical group characteristics: “Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55). The spectrum represented by the space between these definitions captures the fluid, changing, and dynamic qualities that have characterized this term—particularly when used to describe which persons are considered White.

The term “racial identity” was defined by Helms (1993) as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1993, p.3). There is confusion between the terms “racial identity” and “ethnic identity” in contemporary American society, and definitions of ethnicity vary across disciplines. In the field of sociology, ethnicity is defined as “groups who share a common culture” that is developed “within the context of systems of power” (Andersen & Collins, 2007, p. 82). A foundational article on ethnic identity from the college student development literature was completed over 20 years ago by Phinney (1990), who reviewed over 70 studies of ethnic identity published from 1972 to 1990. Within the field, studies on ethnic identity have focused primarily on Asian American and Latino college students (Evans et al., 2010). While the current study did not encompass research on ethnicity, it is necessary to define the term “ethnic identity” because it is used interchangeably with racial identity in some fields and may be understood as synonymous by the participants in this study.

History. There is a gap in the literature about how White persons experience and develop their racial identity while participating in higher education. Several authors identify the need for more empirical research on how students’ perceptions of their White racial and ethnic identity is interpreted and changes while in college, as the body of knowledge available is described as small and largely theoretical (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003; Miville, Darlington, Whitlock, & Muligan, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Phinney, 2005). White identity models are severely limited; fail to account for factors such as gender, social class, and sexual orientation; use methods that evoke participants to focus on “the other” instead of their own experiences as White persons; and do not connect theory with practice for the student affairs profession (Chesler et al., 2003; Evans et al., 2010; McKinney, 2005; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000).

Several authors note a dearth of qualitative studies related to White students' openness to diversity, experiences with race and racial climate, and racism on college campuses (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Whitt et al., 2001).

Researchers have identified the need to learn more about how White students develop a racial identity, citing the importance of this information for professional development of student affairs professionals. In particular, Mercer and Cunningham (2003) stated:

Examining the nature of the development of negative and positive White identity and the factors that contribute to that development may help college administrators and educators promote both individual development, through the adaptive resolution of stress related to encountering diversity, and institutional development, through creating an environment that encourages such individual exploration. (p. 228)

Moving from research to theory to practice is noted as an essential process to affect in a systematic way White college students' awareness of the "hegemony" of Whiteness (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000) and their understanding of oppression and privilege (Evans et al., 2010). Further study of the formation of White racial identity will yield critical information that can help those in higher education create a rich learning atmosphere for postsecondary students.

Models of White Racial Identity Theory

The next three sections detail the foremost studies in the field of White racial identity of college students. The bulk of the research done in this field can be traced to Janet Helms, a professor of counseling psychology. From her work over several decades, various models have been developed and critiqued. Her work has also inspired other researchers to suggest alternate models. As of the current day, there are only two available and widely used measures of White racial identity (Evans et al., 2010; Pope-Davis, & Vandiver, Stone, 1999, p. 71), both of which

are outlined in the next sections of this proposal. Literature from the early 1990s included a call for more research, and judging from a review of studies published since then, this call has not been answered (Evans et al., 2010; Hardiman, 2001; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995). There is a particular lack of qualitative studies, as the few studies that do exist are quantitative in nature. Since there are so few studies to review, the two most prominent and cited models are explained in the next section.

Helms. Studies exploring racial identity began to appear in the early 1970s. The Civil Rights Movement provided the impetus for research around identity development, with the focus initially on African Americans only. Through the early 1990s, therapists working with Black clients had been utilizing either the “client-as-problem perspective” or the Nigresence model to interpret and explain behavior related to racial identity (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1993, p. 9). Both of these models made use of what Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) refer to as “oppression-adaptive models” (p. 129) used to explain ethnic minority development. These views positioned Black persons as “deviant” since the field was absent theories and explanations for how Black persons could develop “healthy nonvengeful personalities in spite of the racial discrimination to which they had been exposed” (Helms, 1993, p.9). Racism and oppression have influenced the study of racial identity greatly, with continued discussion about the need to expand the conversation beyond the Black/White dichotomy. However, the origins of research on White racial identity were in response to models developed to describe Black racial identity.

The predominant theory of White racial identity to date was authored by Helms (1993) from her experiences in the field of counseling psychology. In her book, *Black and White Racial Identity*, Helms acknowledged how the early research in identity development influenced her views. These works included Cross’s stage theory (1971) and Hardiman’s (1979) view that

racism provided the impetus for identity exploration. The White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) was developed by Helms based on her five-stage model to measure the attitudes of White persons. Helms extended her previous work (1984) from a five-stage to a six model of White Racial Identity Development (WRID), with an explanation of the series of stages and phases White persons negotiate in their development. First, White persons must acknowledge and abandon racism in order to develop a “healthy” White identity. The first three stages (Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration) are included in this initial phase called the Abandonment of Racism. The last three stages (Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy) are considered part of the second phase: Defining a Nonracist White Identity.

In the first stage (Contact), White persons become conscious of the existence of Black persons, but are unaware institutional and cultural racism are resulting in the differential treatment. Once the White individual has enough social interaction with Black persons to shift their previous identity schema, they begin to enter the second stage of Helms model (Disintegration). Helms discussed the “moral dilemma” presented to White people in this stage, resulting in unpleasant feelings of being aware Black persons suffer unequal treatment in society. To deal with their discomfort, persons who are White may choose to either ignore or evade these feelings, or find new ways of thinking about their relationship with persons who are Black—which may lead to a disintegration of the old ways of thinking and being. The latter choice indicates growth to the third stage (Re-integration), during which time White people may be “active” or “passive” in their behaviors. Both approaches involve White individuals seeing themselves as worthy of their privilege—and viewing Black persons as undeserving and responsible for their lesser place in society. Passive individuals avoid contact or interactions with Black persons, while active individuals may confront or express anger openly at or about

Black persons. Movement out of this first phase occurs when a White individual realizes racism is unacceptable and makes a conscious decision to abandon this previous way of thinking.

The focus of the second phase of Helms's model is for persons who are White to develop a "nonracist" way of viewing themselves. Stage four (pseudo-independence) is aptly named because it involves White persons trying to find a new way to define their identity but being very unsure how to do so. Behaviors during this stage may include increased attempts to interact with Black persons—particularly to discover how Black people may be the cause of racism and an understanding that racism exists. In both examples, the White individual is in limbo because their previous identity has dissolved, and a new identity is still forming. Once enough experiences and knowledge are accumulated to take them beyond stereotypical expectations based on race, the White individual advances to the fifth stage (Immersion/Emersion). This stage is one of transition during which the White person becomes absorbed in answering questions about their own White identity and then emerges with the desire to affect how other White persons think about race. Persons in this stage plan or take actions to address racism and make change. Helms described an "emotional catharsis" at the end of this phase that signals movement to the final stage of development for White persons (Autonomy). At last, the White individual has developed a healthy perception of self and definition of what it means to be White in a discriminatory society. White persons in this phase search for opportunities to interact with persons of other races and continually search for ways to combat racism in society. Several key ideas underpin Helms's (1993) work and the six stages of WRID can be summarized in this quote:

The development of White identity in the United States is closely intertwined with the development and progress of racism in this country. The greater the extent that racism exists and is denied, the less possible it is to develop a positive White identity. (p. 49)

Each stage of the WRID model relates back to the individual's awareness, acceptance, and actions in response to racism. Due to the number of experiences that must be accumulated and critical reflection necessary in order to achieve the upper stages of development in Helms' model, it is most likely that the majority of persons who reach the final stage are older, White adults.

Helms's research regarding racial identity formation is regarded as seminal in the field of counseling and beyond. Her work around White identity is consistently cited in research on student development (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilson & Wolf-Wendel, 2005). McEwen (2005) defined "good theory" as an idea that is tested and results in more "new research and new ideas, which in turn, inform new theories" (p. 16). Helms's work qualifies as good theory because it has spurred much discussion, critique, and further research. In particular, the WRIAS was criticized heavily as too simplistic and not truly measuring all constructs of Helms's model of WRID as well as not sound from a psychometric perspective (Behrens, 1997; Kyle, 2001; Pope-Davis et al., 1999; Rowe et al., 1995). Due to the lack of empirical research available on Helms's model, Mercer and Cunningham (2003) stated it is "a theoretical model describing the nature of White identity rather than a developmental model of White identity" (p. 219). Helms responded to critiques with directives about the way tools such as the WRIAS should be used in research and suggestions for improving practices around measuring racial or ethnic identity (2007). For the current study, a thorough understanding of Helms's theory and model provided a lens for viewing and examining the responses of White college students.

Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson's White Racial Consciousness Model. The most significant critiques of Helms's work with WRID came from Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994). As seen in the previous paragraph, a number of researchers echo this criticism. Rowe et al. (1994) state five chief concerns with Helms's model. In their first criticism, the authors state the model wrongly uses the experiences of African Americans and racial minorities in general to examine/predict the development of Whites. Persons in the racial minority must adapt in response to their oppression by White people at the personal, cultural, and institutional levels of American society, resulting in the oppressive-adaptive models. Since the White experience is used as the dominant force for causing change, these oppressive-adaptive models are not helpful in explaining White development, according to the detractors. Second, Helms's model is critiqued for not truly examining how White identity develops but instead explaining how White persons respond to "others" who are not White. Although Helms acknowledged most White people are unaware of their race at first, Rowe et al. (1994) highlighted the lack of concrete steps that detail how White identity forms and grows after initial awareness of itself. The theme of "othering" is evident in much of the research on White racial identity (Chesler et al., 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Third, the authors question the utility of Helms's model as a "stage" process when there is "nothing other than our imposed ethics that imbues the stages with ordered levels of desirability" (p. 132). The assumption that White people will select the "healthy" path of development as suggested by Helms is not guaranteed, and thus problematic. A fourth critique of Helms's work is that the model deals with the binary of White and Black only and ignores other races. Lastly, Rowe et al. (1994) indicate the model is not supported by empirical study.

As an alternative, Rowe et al. (1994) proposed their own terminology and model explaining how identity develops for White persons. They used the phrase “White racial consciousness” to describe an approach that consists of fluid and changeable attitude and behavior groupings instead of stages. Persons can pass in and out of groupings throughout their lives based on events, with Rowe et al denying this movement should be considered “developmental” in nature (p. 134). This concept is described in depth by Rowe et al. (1995):

White racial consciousness is conceived as the characteristic attitudes held by a person regarding the significance of being White, particularly in terms of what that implies in relation to those who do not share White group membership. ... Whatever the pattern of beliefs one may have regarding these issues, it is likely to be reflected to some extent in one's expressed attitudes, overt behaviors, and related affect, and it is from these observable manifestations that the person's type of "racial consciousness" can be inferred (p. 225).

The idea of an external event causing reflection upon race is consistent with the work of Chesler et al. (2003) who suggested college students must have a significant experience with their race to cause them to reflect upon it in order to “see” their Whiteness (p. 224). Participants in the current study were asked a series of questions to determine what types of on and off-campus experiences caused them to comprehend or think about their race while in college.

The model created by Rowe et al. (1994) consists of two statuses (Unachieved White Racial Consciousness and Achieved White Racial Consciousness) and six attitude groupings or types. Movement between and among groups can occur if a person experiences discord in relation to their racial identity, acknowledges that conflict, and acts upon it. This change of types can be viewed as positive or negative movement, based on the encounter. In contrast to the

linear and evolving direction of Helms model, fluctuation and departure from the desired states are expected as part of the model suggested by Rowe et al. (1994).

The Unachieved White Racial Consciousness status encompasses the Avoidant, Dependent, and Dissonant types. Collectively, these groupings indicate the individual has failed to fully consider and/or commit to their White identity. The Avoidant type evades dealing with the issues of Whiteness and its impact on society. Since society is dominated by White culture, this option is available only to White people as a privilege. Dependent types are those who rely solely on others to determine their racial identity, as in the case of children and parents. The meaning of race is not significant in their lives. People may stay in this stage their entire lives. The Dissonant type are those who are between being confident in their identity and being unsure, perhaps due to a recent event that caused them to reflect upon the meaning of their race. The individual is searching for explanations but uncommitted to beliefs about race.

Within the Achieved White Racial Consciousness status are included the Dominative, Conflictive, and Reactive types. For the Dominative type, negative stereotypes about persons of Color and superiority of White persons are key themes. White is viewed as normal, and other races are avoided or treated with aggression. Quite different from Helms's focus on healthy embraces of White identity which, are achieved by overcoming racism, Rowe et al. (1994) acknowledge the Dominative type as undesirable. Persons in the Conflictive type category can identify overt racism and may oppose it. However, they also subscribe to the American dream philosophy of self-made persons. As such, programs to address past wrongs (such as Affirmative Action for college admissions or hiring, and reparations) are strongly opposed as being unfairly based on race. Individuals who are Conflictive types view all things as being equal in the present day; they do not see the need for such programs. White persons who

identify as Reactive are taking some type of action to redress the racism they know exists in society. However, their actions are often coming from their own White experience, and therefore are uninformed. Those in the Conflictive group may put persons of Color on a pedestal and excuse inappropriate behavior as necessary for them to live in an unjust world. Conflictive persons may be viewed as race traitors by other White persons. The last group, Integrative types, understand their Whiteness and interact with persons of other races easily. Their view of society is multifaceted, but they may still develop and/or cycle through other groupings or types. Rowe et al. (1994) cautioned that this group not be viewed as being in a “state of racial self-actualization or transcendence, but more as a process” (p. 141). In line with the philosophy of the model, change is always possible since humans have new and differing experiences each day. Unlike Helms’s stage model in which it was more likely that only older adults could reach the final stage of a healthy, White identity after accumulating many life experiences, the construct of White Racial Consciousness suggests that racial identity is not necessarily tied as closely to advanced age. Rather, the right combination of events could produce awareness in a less linear fashion.

The work of Rowe et al. (1994) was noteworthy, but did not escape critique and revision. To measure the types/statuses proposed by Rowe et al. (1994), the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form (ORAS-P) was developed by Choney and Behrens (1996) and was expected to provide “empirical assessment” of the model (Rowe et al., 1995, p. 231). However, in independent studies designed to test the psychometric structure of the WRIAS and ORAS-P, both instruments were found to be lacking in their ability to measure dimensionality (Pope-Davis et al., 1999). The concept of White racial consciousness was revised by LaFleur et al. (2002). The dominative and integrative types were renamed “racial acceptance”; conflictive and reactive

types were renamed “racial justice” with both groupings existing at opposite ends of the spectrum (p. 150). Recently, the White Racial Consciousness Development Scale (WRCDS) originally developed by Clancy and Parker (1989) was revised to remedy issues with low reliability and may prove to be informative in future research (Lee et al., 2007; Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007).

The work of Helms (1990) and Rowe et al. (1994) stimulated research on White identity development and White racial consciousness that informed the current study. Recent studies using these theories and models developed by Helms and Rowe et al. showed many facets of social identity affected the formation of racial identity for White women in higher education environments (Mueller & Pope, 2003; Robbins, 2012; Wolff & Munley, 2012). White persons who identified with an oppressed group (such as women and gay, lesbian, bisexual persons) demonstrated that these features of their identity had an effect on their White racial consciousness, as did the dimension of age—the latter suggesting the need to re-examine the model of Rowe et al. (1994) from a developmental lens (Mueller & Pope, 2003). Multiple intersecting identities and the recognition of White privilege have been found as factors that shaped the construction of White identity in female graduate students (Robbins, 2012). Other studies examined ways White students learned about their own race in college through formal and informal activities (Christensen, 1997; Ford, 2012; Lewis, Neville, & Spanierman, 2012). Collectively, these studies suggest the theories and models developed by Helms (1990) and Rowe et al. (1994) related to White racial identity and consciousness continue to be robust areas for further research, critique, and formation of new theories.

Despite the aforementioned attempts, it appears there is no consensus on a satisfactory measure of White racial consciousness and there is a need for more study and exploration of

alternative models. The current study provides much needed information about the racial identity of White college students – an area that is lacking in both quantitative and qualitative research.

Intersectional Theory and Holistic Approaches to Racial Identity Development. The preeminent models of White racial identity development suggested by Helms (1993) and Rowe et al. (1994) focus just on the formation of race. Attention on only one feature of human development is a noted limitation in college student development literature. Although useful to fully examine how a singular aspect of identity develops, scholars in the fields of sociology as well as higher education have emphasized the utility of studying simultaneously the multiple ways people identify themselves. This section provides an overview of these two disciplines which have contributed to the small but growing field of holistic human development models that incorporate multiple and intersecting dimensions of identity.

The field of sociology—particularly intersectionality theory—suggests racial identity is impossible to develop apart from variables such as socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) was the first to use the term *intersectionality* in the context of writing about the way racism and sexism combined contributed to violence against women. Weber (2001) created a conceptual framework outlining the domains and structures of oppression with her work demonstrating the idea that together “race, class, gender, and sexuality are interdependent systems of oppression” (p. 30). Further, she stated the need to study these systems as they affect each other: “Dominant perspectives in modern social science as well as in the media tend to interpret complex lives in very isolated and limited ways by attending to only a single dimension” (p. 67). Andersen and Collins (2007) also proposed a matrix of domination framework that “posits interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal

configuration of race, class, and gender relations” (p. 5). These authors suggest studying only one element of human existence in isolation yields an incomplete description of the element being observed – especially when working with human beings.

The idea of creating more holistic models of human development is echoed in higher education literature through the field of college student development and adult learner theory. Recent research of interest to the current study is related to examining racial, gender, and ego identities among White college students (Miville et al., 2005) and the interplay between family environment, feminist identity, and White racial consciousness (Wolff & Munley, 2012). From the field of counseling psychology, the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991) around identity development and multiple oppressions is cited heavily in the student affairs literature, with particular interest in the multidimensionality identity model or MIM (Evans, et al., 2010). Several researchers have called for more investigation of how the multiple identities of college students intersect during their development (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Evans et al., 2010; Jones & McEwen, 2005). Jones and McEwen (2000) began this work with the proposal of a model of multiple dimensions of identity. In 2007, they provided a reconceptualized model that added the notion of meaning making and offered a “more complex understanding of college students' development for designing programs and environments to enhance the complexities of students' development” (Abes et al., 2007, p. 20). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) present racial identity development for non-traditionally aged adult learners in terms of being socially constructed and connected to other aspects of how the adult student grows and changes. These authors state related to adult learners, "A person's race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, among other positionalities, intersect to influence the development of that person" (p. 315). This statement echoes the themes found in the aforementioned college student

development literature which generally focuses on traditionally aged students. Each of the inquiries highlighted provide important aspects to consider. Knowledge of the research included in this section offered a multitude of lenses and perspectives for examining participants' responses in the current study.

Whiteness Studies

The second body of literature reviewed for the current study was Whiteness studies. The field of Whiteness studies is described by academics as salient, controversial, and emergent (Andersen, 2003; Hartman, 2004; Owen, 2011). Higher education and non-profit organizations have offered courses on the subject as well as hosted symposia, workshops, and conferences recently on the topics of White privilege and critical Whiteness studies. Scholars have noted the growth of the field is "little short of astonishing" (Ignatiev, 2003, p.221) and there has included "an explosion of awareness in the academy of the social and historical dimensions of Whiteness" (Kolchin, 2002, p. 154). Conversations about Whiteness have crossed over from the halls of academia to popular culture as well. Books, articles, and interviews about Whiteness have been featured in news sources such as the *Washington Post* and National Public Radio as well as in blogs and websites (Fears, 2003). A March 2011 article on CNN.com posed the question, "Are Whites racially oppressed?" with opinions ranging from expressions of fear to optimism for a future that embraces diversity.

I explored the field of Whiteness studies in the United States only, with special emphasis on major research and writings in the field. The origins of Whiteness studies in America can be traced back to pre-Civil War slavery, and a brief history of how the field developed is provided. Also integral to the development of Whiteness studies is the history of racism in the United States, which grew in tandem with slavery. Scholars and researchers have documented and

discussed at length the harmful effects of racism in modern American society (Dalton, 2012; Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). A basic knowledge of historical events related to slavery and racism is necessary to understanding how White racial identity has developed in the United States and how current White college students interpret their own race.

This section is organized as follows: first, a definition for the field of Whiteness studies is offered. Second, the history of Whiteness studies is reviewed and explained using Twine and Gallagher's three waves concept (2008). Third, notable contributors to the field are highlighted. Then, major themes in the research are examined and gaps are appraised. Lastly, the future of the field is considered.

Defining Whiteness Studies

While race is acknowledged by scholars as a socially constructed phenomenon, its influence on many aspects of human life is evident—from micro-level day-to-day interactions to the macro-level structuring of modern social systems. Whiteness studies seek to explain what it means to be racially White or Caucasian, particularly in the United States where the culture is hegemonically White. Instead of studying relations among the races, Whiteness studies examine the “socially constructed nature of White identity and the impact of Whiteness upon intergroup relations” (Doane, 2003, p. 3). Whiteness is described by scholars as a social structure that makes everything White seem the norm (Doane, 2003; Dyer, 2012; McIntosh, 2007; Omi & Winant, 1994; Rothenberg, 2012). As a result, White people “occupy a location of structural advantage that generates material and psychological privileges and benefits” (Owen, 2011, p. 942). Although originating in the fields of cultural and legal studies, the analysis of Whiteness currently incorporates knowledge from a variety of fields including multicultural education,

sociology, psychology, intersectionality, and historical studies of the emergence of White racism, privilege, and racial identity (Andersen, 2003; Doane, 2003).

Although at times mistakenly associated with White supremacist movements, Whiteness studies scholars seek not to make Whiteness the center of the discussion but instead to “destabilize” White identity and as Andersen (2003) states, “to expose, examine and challenge it” (p. 22). A common approach for authors writing about the subject of Whiteness is to draw from their own experiences of racism, either as a victim or oppressor—a point for which the field is often criticized as too culturally based (Andersen 2003; Kolchin, 2002). Whiteness studies have been linked to the American political left with a social justice agenda of disrupting White privilege (Fears, 2003; Hartman, 2004; Kolchin, 2002). The term “Whiteness studies” is related to exploring and acknowledging White privilege and racism, and should not be conflated with White supremacy—the belief White people are superior to all other races.

The History of Whiteness Studies

Only recently have people who are White begun to study themselves and the significance of their own race. A much longer history exists of African Americans describing the meaning of Whiteness, mostly during the time when slavery existed in the United States. Scholars have argued Black perspectives on Whiteness are what made race visible to White people in the United States, and that the “nation’s keenest students of White consciousness and White behavior” have been African Americans (Roediger, 1998, p. 4). Twine and Gallagher (2008) reinforced this concept with their classification of the history of Whiteness studies into three waves, with African Americans contributing earliest and in each wave. These categories are a useful way to organize a brief historical overview of Whiteness studies.

First wave of Whiteness studies. Twine and Gallagher (2008) defined the first wave of Whiteness studies as beginning with the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, who is cited as originating the “critical treatment of Whiteness” (Hartman, 2004, p. 22). Scholars have suggested that while the field of Whiteness studies seems to have gained attention only recently, it is in fact a “repackaging” of Du Bois’s work (Doane, 2003, p. 4; Fears, 2003). Historian and activist, Du Bois advocated in the early to mid-1900s for the rights of African Americans. In *Darkwater* (1920), one of Du Bois’s many books, he wrote a chapter entitled, “The Souls of White Folk” in which he pondered from an African American perspective the meaning of Whiteness and its pervasiveness. Du Bois described a fictional dialogue between himself and a White man who pitied Du Bois for his Blackness, and suggested that someday perhaps he would be lucky enough to be reborn as White. Du Bois’ response was characteristic of the pioneering manner in which he questioned White dominance in much of his writing: “But what on earth is Whiteness that one should so desire it?” (p. 30). In the Whiteness literature, W.E.B. Du Bois is frequently cited as the first person to write about what it meant to be White—particularly the benefits of being a White worker in the early 1900s (Doane, 2003; Feagin et al., 2001; Hartman, 2004; Ignatiev, 2003; Roediger, 2007). Although his work was ignored for some time by the majority of White academics, Du Bois laid the groundwork that encouraged the next wave of writings about Whiteness.

Second wave of Whiteness studies. Du Bois’s observations and questioning of Whiteness inspired other African American writers to continue to challenge the ubiquitous nature of White privilege. Twine and Gallagher (2008) defined the second wave as a time when writers told of the lived experiences of Black people and examined race critically in an effort to make “White supremacy and institutional racism visible” (p. 10). An African American author

prominent in the second wave was Langston Hughes. In his short story, “Slave on the Block” he wrote of a female slave who searched the faces of would-be White owners, looking for clues as to their demeanor and humanity while waiting to find out her fate and eventual owner (Roediger, 1998, p. 3). This internal dialogue made visible in Hughes’s work provides a stark picture of Whiteness and how it was perceived by person who are not White.

Ralph Ellison’s musings in a 1970 *Time* magazine article entitled, “What America Would Be Like Without Blacks” laid a foundation for future White studies theorists:

Since the beginning of the nation, White Americans have suffered from a deep inner uncertainty as to who they really are. One of the ways that has been used to simplify the answer has been to seize upon the presence of Black Americans and use them as a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for the ‘outsider.’ Many Whites could look at the social position of Blacks and feel that color formed an easy and reliable gauge for determining to what extent one was or was not American (as cited in Roediger, 1998, p. 166).

Ellison’s comment on the inability of White persons to comprehend their own race has echoed throughout the modern literature regarding White racial identity. The observation that Whites viewed African Americans as the “outsider” is consistent with much research since the 1980s that explored the concept of persons who are White viewing persons who are not White as the “other”. White scholars studying ethnicity and race commonly referred to “the others” and assumed persons of Color would assimilate eventually to the pervasive White culture (Doane, 2003, p. 3). Modern scholars point to the writings of a White sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, as influential in promoting assimilationist thinking. The most often cited of his works is *The American Dilemma*, originally published in 1944 (Doane, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994; Twine &

Gallagher, 2008). Myrdal acknowledged the problem of racism in the United States, and in 1944 discussed the need to determine “what goes on in the minds of White Americans” (Myrdal, 1999, p. lxxxiii). At that time in history, theorists like Myrdal believed White prejudice was a temporary problem and that African Americans would eventually assimilate into the dominant culture. This idea proved to be a failure, as it did not contribute to White people comprehending the pervasiveness of their racial and cultural domination (Doane, 2003).

James Baldwin, a contemporary of Ellison, is considered an authority on twentieth century White consciousness. In “White Man’s Guilt” published in 1965 in *Ebony*, Baldwin contemplated the meaning of Whiteness from a Black perspective:

This is the place in which it seems to me most White Americans find themselves.

Impaled. They are dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, but they do not know how to release themselves from it, and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence. This incoherence is heard nowhere more plainly than in those stammering, terrified dialogues which White Americans sometimes entertain with the Black conscience, the Black man in America. (p. 47)

Contemporary research contains several examples of modern day White college students demonstrating the “stammering” Baldwin wrote about in 1965 (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000).

Whiteness studies was primarily dualistic throughout the first two waves identified by Twine and Gallagher (2008): only people who were Black and White contributed and were subjects of interest. Ignatiev (2003) observed that for several decades after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, little was written about Whiteness resulting in almost 20 years of inactivity. Then, in the 1990s, a flurry of scholarly activity in Whiteness emerged. Several

important books were published, beginning with Alexander Saxton's *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990). Shortly thereafter, Roediger wrote *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991). Theodore Allen published two volumes entitled *The Invention of the White Race* in 1994 and 1997. At roughly the same time, Ignatiev produced *How the Irish Became White* (1995). In an effort to challenge White supremacy as the center point of American history, White scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and Peggy McIntosh also figured prominently in the second wave of Whiteness studies. Writing about topics such as the "Whitening" of European immigrants, feminist perspectives on Whiteness, and the exclusion of the viewpoints and voices of persons of Color from American history, these and other historians writing during the 1990s contributed to the boom of this second wave. Twine and Gallagher (2008) did not provide an exact end date for this wave, but placed it near the conclusion of the millennium.

Third wave of Whiteness studies. While the first two waves of Whiteness studies focused largely on persons who were Black and White, the third wave diverged significantly. Continuing with Twine and Gallagher's framework (2008) of Whiteness studies, the third wave addressed the various tensions inherent in Whiteness studies today—namely the vastly different life experiences of White people from various social classes:

Third wave Whiteness makes these contradictions explicit by acknowledging the relational, contextual and situational ways in which White privilege can be at the same time a taken-for-granted entitlement, a desired social status, a perceived source of victimization, and a tenuous situational identity. It is these White inflections, these nuanced and locally specific ways in which Whiteness as a form of power is defined,

deployed, performed, policed and reinvented that is the central focus of third wave Whiteness (p. 7).

Three distinct features characterized the third wave of Whiteness studies: use of new research methodologies such as racial consciousness biographies (McKinney, 2005) to examine how White persons interpret and make meaning of their Whiteness on a daily basis; examination of how people who are White rebuilt their identities and reformulated Whiteness in recent years; and the movement to study people beyond the Black/White dichotomy, namely immigrants to the United States of Latino and Caribbean origin (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 12). The field has advanced quickly in the last decade. Critiques of Whiteness studies made in earlier waves have been addressed in the third wave (Andersen, 2003; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). Although criticized by some as a “passing intellectual fad,” scholars have argued recently this field is expected to continue its growth (Doane, 2003; Kolchin, 2002; Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 4). The study of Whiteness and White privilege will continue to be salient for higher education researchers for years to come to examine the effects of the changing U.S. demographics highlighted earlier in this study.

Notable Contributions to the Field of Whiteness Studies

Several names appear repeatedly in the recent literature about Whiteness studies. Scholars identify three “landmark publications” that have influenced the field of Whiteness studies (Andersen, 2003, p. 22; Powell, 2000; Weber, 2001). These include the work of sociologist Ruth Frankenberg; feminist and activist, Peggy McIntosh; and professor and historian David Roediger. What follows is a brief summary of these major works and background on the authors.

Ruth Frankenberg. In the mid-1980s, a sociologist named Ruth Frankenberg conducted a study that involved 30 White women who were living in California. Using oral-history interviews, Frankenberg sought to answer the question, “What is White women’s relationship to racism?” (1993, p. 32). Of this work, she said, “I wanted to know who, racially and ethnically speaking, each woman encountered and in what circumstances, how she came to conceptualize people of different racial and ethnic groups, and whether she saw herself as a racially or ethnically identified being” (1993, p. 26). In 1993, Frankenberg published a book detailing her research and findings called *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*. This work established Frankenberg as a pioneer in the field of Whiteness studies and influenced the dynamic growth of the field at this time (Andersen, 2003; McKinney, 2005; Pierce, 2003).

Frankenberg’s work is often cited by other authors and scholars as proof Whiteness is a socially constructed identity (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Owen, 2011; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Weber, 2001), although W.E.B. Du Bois is credited as having first written about Whiteness as a social construction (Hartman, 2004, p. 22). “Race, class, gender, and sexuality are historically and geographically specific because they are social constructs whose meaning develops out of group struggles over socially valued resources” explained Weber (p. 80). Frankenberg (1993) wrote about three “linked dimensions” of Whiteness that arose from her research and are still relevant today:

First, Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privileges. Second, it is a “standpoint,” a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked or unnamed. (p. 1)

The idea of Whiteness being “unmarked” and difficult for White persons to reflect upon and explain was evident in the responses given by participants during Frankenberg’s interviews. She found the White women, who ranged in age from their twenties to over ninety, struggled to respond to questions about race and racial issues, retreating into “color-evasive” responses Bonilla-Silva later called “color-blind racism” (Pierce, 2003, p. 213). The response of Cathy Thomas in Frankenberg’s study emphasized this point: “But to be a Heinz 57 American, a White, class-confused American, land of the Kleenex type American, is so formless in and of itself. It only takes shape in relation to other people” (1993, p. 196). Due to the pervasiveness of Whiteness and their own race privilege, Frankenberg theorized that these adult women and other White people were unable to understand the ways racism affected and structured the social order and the impact it had on them as individuals.

Inability for White people to see their own Whiteness led Frankenberg’s exploration of a concept mentioned often in this study and the literature: “the other.” She traced the White fascination with visual racial difference to what she called “colonial discourses” that occurred when the United States was formed (1993, p. 16). Although not the originator of this term, Frankenberg explained focusing on “the Other” led White people away from examining self for the majority of U.S. history. Frankenberg’s work is particularly interesting in light of the current study due to the number of non-traditionally aged women she interviewed.

Peggy McIntosh. In 1988, Peggy McIntosh published an essay entitled, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies.” This work was called “groundbreaking” and inspired much research and discussion about Whiteness (Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Mitchell & Edwards, 2010; Owen, 2011). In this article, McIntosh made the now-famous comparison between White

privilege and an “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (1988, p. 2). The thrust of McIntosh’s work was that she admitted to being largely unaware of the over 46 ways in which Whiteness afforded her “minor and major advantages” (Tatum, 2010, p. 126). This lack of awareness has been a major theme in the literature since the field began, but McIntosh’s representation provided an effective and compelling metaphor to describe privilege.

David Roediger. Labor historian and professor David Roediger is often cited in relation to the study of Whiteness due to his book, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991). He republished this book with additional commentary in 1999 and 2007. In these works, Roediger located the identification of Whiteness with the beginning of slavery in the United States. “White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as ‘not slaves’ and as ‘not Blacks’” (2007, p. 13). This sentence is the most frequently referenced of Roediger’s writings. Based on this idea, Roediger stated White persons then viewed Black persons as “the other,” a phrase now well-known when describing White identity (Andersen, 2003, p. 27). Roediger examined the changing historical meaning of Whiteness and the cultural capital tied to it, with particular interest in European immigrants who aspired to and eventually claimed Whiteness to increase their wages (Doane, 2003; Feagin, et al., 2001). He emphasized the need to examine race historically as it interacted with labor and class (Andersen, 2003). Roediger has been associated with discussion on abolitionists, particularly after publishing *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class* (1994). Roediger’s contributions are often characterized as “psychological and cultural explanations” for White supremacy (Ignatiev, 2003, p. 231).

Themes in the Research

Several themes emerged from the literature on Whiteness. Andersen (2003) suggested three broad categories for organizing the many ideas in this field: Whiteness as the norm, Whiteness as privilege, and Whiteness as a social construction (p. 24). In the next section, I first explain the significance of each category and then provide examples to support the themes from the literature.

Whiteness as the norm. The first theme across Whiteness research and writings was the idea that Whiteness is the norm. Being White was described as the natural way things ought to be, and White people struggled to understand, acknowledge, or explain their own race. Andersen (2003) stated “White is ubiquitous, though typically not acknowledged” (p. 24). In this category, there are several subthemes that support the idea of Whiteness as the standard: a low degree of self-awareness, feelings of culturelessness, difficulty in explaining Whiteness, and the notion that Whiteness is normal. For each of these subthemes, examples from the literature are provided.

Low degree of self-awareness. The most common theme across the literature was that White people were described as largely unaware of their Whiteness and its meaning (Doane, 2003, p. 7). Du Bois was the first to observe this in his work of the late 1800s published in *The Philadelphia Negro* (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). He remarked White persons were unable to identify their own culture and privilege, and this idea still stands as pioneering and relevant in Whiteness studies literature today. Doane (2003) found “White Americans have a lower degree of self-awareness about race and their own racial identity than members of other racial-ethnic groups” (p. 7). Helms (2008) described White people as largely “unconscious” of White culture (p. 21) and suggested they are “oblivious” to dimensions of race due to “their privileged status” (p. 30).

Many White students have entered college unaware of their own culture because they experienced K – 12 school systems almost completely absent of students of Color (Reason & Evans, 2007; Tatum, 2007). Without an event that forced them to “see” their own race, White students have been observed to complete college unaware of their own identity and the hegemony of Whiteness (Chesler et al., 2003, p. 224). In one study, White students described their social experiences on campus as satisfying and predicted students of Color would feel similarly even when contrary evidence was presented to them (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 212). Scholars attributed this low level of awareness among White, traditional age students to a lack of “meaningful” or “required” programs that encourage reflection on racial identity and privilege during college (Chesler et al., 2003, p. 224; Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 212). Whiteness is described as “deep and hidden in the individual psyche” as well as a “hidden identity” (Feagin et al., 2001, p. 26). There is ample evidence in the literature that overall, White people have failed to see and understand their own identity (Lipsitz, 2012).

Feelings of culturelessness. In many of the studies on Whiteness, White persons have described feeling they lack a definable culture. However, much of the literature named Whiteness as the “normative center” in society (Doane, 2003, p. 7; McIntosh, 2007; Rothenberg, 2012). While this may seem contradictory, it is for exactly this reason White people were unable to name their culture. Whiteness was described as so pervasive and “universalized” that it escaped the consciousness of most White persons (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Dalton, 2012). Consistently, White participants have indicated they believe persons of Color have a culture, while person who are White do not. White people have described “a sense of culturelessness and racelessness” and identified less with their ethnic backgrounds than did previous generations— an idea that supports the “mainstreaming or normalization of Whiteness” (Doane, 2003, p. 7).

When asked about their culture, Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) reported White college students often responded, “What do you mean by White culture? There isn’t one” (p. 224).

Due to their privileged status, Whites may not have personally suffered acts of racial discrimination and often were surprised when persons of Color reported such incidents. Frankenberg (1993) found this lack of culturelessness to be one of the major reasons many White participants in her studies reported being unaware of racism: they viewed racism as a problem for people of Color only. As a result, White interviews dismissed their role and ability to address racism because they viewed it as “something external to us rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6). These examples demonstrate well the concept of White people not being able to name their customs and practices as a culture.

Difficulty in explaining Whiteness. Across works about Whiteness, authors and researchers have found White people have difficulty talking about their own race. Helms (2008) noted many studies that reported White persons were unable to talk about their race easily. Instead of explaining what it meant to be White, participants often identified “their nationality, American or a specific ethnicity such as Italian, Irish, Jewish, Polish, or in many cases, ‘mutt’ or ‘mongrel’” (Helms, 2008, p. 19). Other researchers also reported their White participants struggled with explaining race in studies (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; McKinney, 2005).

Further complicating this issue is the language White persons used when communicating with or about people of other races. Helms (2008) argued that Whites’ discomfort and inability to express their feelings about Whiteness was “embedded in our language” and is further complicated by the many affirmative images connected with Whiteness and the negative images linked to Blackness (p. 16). She provided an example of a White mother responding to her child

who commented when seeing a Person of Color in a store. The mother considered a variety of responses from ignoring to scolding to explaining the color differences to the child. In Helms's view, the unfortunate result of White people being so uncomfortable talking about race was that the child "Sally Jane learns that White is the best color to be and there is something wrong with persons who are other than White" (p. 15). Other scholars pointed to the limitations of using words that were not "linguistically neutral" (such as "racism") to describe experiences and categorize people in a privileged world (Wildman & Davis, 2012). Further, these authors stated, "Thus, the very vocabulary we use to talk about discrimination obfuscates these power systems and the privilege that is their natural companion" (p. 110). The result of each of these examples was that White people were uncomfortable talking about race—both their own and that of those they perceive as "others."

Whiteness as normal. A pervasive theme in Whiteness studies was that being White was the standard way of being and what was expected in the United States. Andersen (2003) provided a concise statement that summarized the ubiquitous nature of Whiteness and the position of those who studied it:

...Whiteness scholars assert that "White" has been the unexamined norm, implicitly standing for all that is presumed to be right and normal. Whiteness is the location from which others are defined and judged, since it is White people who hold the power to do so. (p. 24)

Doane (2003) advanced this argument by quoting Toni Morrison who said "deep within the word 'American' is its association with race ... American means White" (p. 12). Going a step further, Dyer (2012) noted "Whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race" (p. 11). Throughout the literature, White was labeled as typical and unseen. Helms suggested this

unnoticed quality made White persons unaware their culture was being forced on persons who were not White as the “best culture” (2008, p. 21). Chesler et al., (2003) described the response of a White participant in their study at the University of Michigan, who was asked why all Black students sat together during lunch there. After hearing a Black student ask the same question about White students, the White participant said, “I was speechless. I thought that was a dumb question until I realized that I see White people sitting together as normal and Black people sitting together as a problem” (Chesler et al., 2003, p. 224). Other researchers have noted the “normative status” of Whiteness (McIntosh, 2007; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000, p. 224; Rothenberg, 2012).

Whiteness as Privilege. A second theme across readings about Whiteness was that it “exists as a system of privilege, mapped on to the domination of ‘others’” (Andersen, 2003, p. 24). The issue of White privilege appeared frequently in studies of Whiteness and was named as a central concern in the literature. White privilege was often described as the “unearned benefits” accrued without any action necessary on their own part (Doane, 2003, p. 7). Helms (2008) named White privilege as “the foundation of racism” (p. 19).

Privilege has been described as “systemic, not an occasional occurrence” (Wildman & Davis, 2012, p. 112). In addition, these authors explained three of the characteristics privilege often grants those in power, “membership in the norm, the ability to choose whether to object to the power system, and the invisibility of its benefit” (p. 112). These three traits were seen across the literature on White privilege. Rothenberg (2012) and Doane (2003) among many others noted White people were often unaware they had privilege. Since White persons were not called upon to speak for their entire race, they chose to remain silent when confronted with racist behaviors (Andersen, 2003, p. 21; Helms, 1993; Wildman & Davis, p. 111). McIntosh’s

aforementioned “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” is one of the most referenced writings on White privilege. A quotation frequently cited in works on Whiteness was McIntosh’s statement: “As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage” (McIntosh, 2007, p. 98). This quote emphasizes the invisibility of both Whiteness and White privilege echoed in much of the Whiteness studies literature.

Another feature I observed in the Whiteness literature related to privilege was the question of the usefulness of examining White privilege without working to dismantle it. A common concern was that focusing on persons who were White instead of those being marginalized once again afforded those in power with additional advantages—even if that benefit was “a sense of relief” (Andersen, 2003, p. 26; Doane, 2003; Helms, 2008; Wildman & Davis, 2012). The common thread woven throughout these works was Whiteness provided many automatic benefits whether or not the person receiving them realized these advantages or willingly accepted them.

Whiteness as a social construction. The third theme evident in much of the literature on Whiteness was that race is a socially constructed category. Within this broad idea, four subcategories were helpful to me in organizing the research: Refuting race as not biologically based; the changing definition of race; race as a control mechanism; and colorblindness as the new racism. Each of these categories are explained briefly with examples provided. The theme of color-blindness was examined in-depth due to its relevance to the current study.

Refuting race as not biologically based. No scientific evidence exists to support a biological basis for categorizing people by race. Instead, Doane named race as an “ideology” and a “historically contingent social identity” (2003, p. 9). The importance of considering race

within its corresponding historical context was mentioned in the literature by several authors, who instructed readers to interpret events holistically and not merely through the lens of race. Wander, Martin, and Nakayama (2012) noted the origins of race categories as having emerged from “the naturalistic science of the 18th and 19th centuries” (p. 34). The theory of biological determinism was predominant at that time, and distinguished the existence of distinct races with genetic differences among races (Makalani, 2003). This theory helped to justify slavery as acceptable labor for Black people. The early 1900s brought the advent of the “Chicago school” of sociology, the theory of assimilation, and the “ethnicity paradigm” which replaced biologically-based arguments (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 15). A broad range of paradigms and theories have been offered since, related to class, nation, and politics (Omi & Winant, 1994; Rothenberg, 2010). These authors acknowledged no single theory exists that fully explains race. In summary, the vast majority of writers about Whiteness refuted the previously held notion that race was a biologically-supported category and maintained the idea that race is a social construction.

The changing definition of race. Another verification for the idea race is socially constructed was the evidence that the meaning of race has transformed many times in history. Rothenberg (2012) highlighted this transitory nature of race: “The changing meanings of Whiteness and who was allowed to be White are at the heart of the claim that Whiteness is a social construct” (p. 3). As the social and political environments of the United States have changed, so has the meaning of race. The majority of writers on Whiteness stated that the varying explanations for race were far from arbitrary. American labor needs led to shifts in the definition of Whiteness for over 100 years, at times welcoming various European immigrants and at others excluding them (Ignatiev 2003; Roediger 1998, 2007). Some suggested this theme

is seen currently with the efforts to limit immigration from Mexico to improve job prospects for “Whites”. Omi and Winant predicted race would continue to “undergo a constant process of re-formation” (as cited in Doane, 2003, p. 9).

Race as a control mechanism. Throughout American history, race-based laws have been created by White persons in an attempt to control the actions and rights of persons of Color – particularly those of Black slaves. Four of the most commonly referenced laws from the Whiteness literature are highlighted because they show how race was used to legitimate actions by the United States during various times in history. During the Constitutional Convention of 1878, the 3/5 Compromise was adopted, essentially defining Black slaves as counting for 3/5 of a person to strengthen Southern representation in Congress (Feagin et al., 2001). The “one drop” theory of the early 1900s stated if a person had even one drop of “non-White blood” they “could not qualify as White” (Wander et al., 2012, p.37). The eugenics movement, popular from the beginning of the 20th century until World War II, “played a vital role ... both in rationalizing the changing demography of race and in justifying the continuation of racial hierarchy” (Winant, 2001, p. 109). The Jim Crow laws and system were implemented in the 1880s as “segregation statutes” (Woodward, 1955, p. 7) that codified all aspects of life for Black persons living in primarily in the southern United States, severely restricting the rights of Blacks and explicitly providing Whites with power and privilege (Pilgrim, 2012). The Jim Crow era was in place until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted (Alexander, 2012). In the Whiteness literature, these events and laws are cited as proof that race is a flexible and socially constructed category that assigns and protects White privilege.

Color-blindness as the new racism. The topic of color-blind racism appeared frequently in the literature on Whiteness beginning in the late 1990s. Reason and Evans (2007) offered a

definition of racism, stating it “involves overt actions of an aggressive or blatantly discriminatory nature taken by one person against another because of that person’s race” (p. 68). The term color-blind racism refers to the beliefs and attitudes that in the post-civil rights era, race is not a barrier to racial equality. Doane (2003) explained this “new” view holds “racism is no longer a structural phenomenon but is limited to hate crimes or other acts of discrimination committed by a small number of prejudiced *individuals*” (p. 13). Bonilla-Silva (2006) offered that color-blind racism is a foil to Jim Crow racism, which focuses on “biological and moral inferiority” of Black persons (p. 2). A person of any race can adopt a color-blind perspective, however much of the literature focused on how White people have wielded this perspective. Due to its relevance to the current study, the theme of color-blindness was examined in-depth.

Reason and Evans (2007) highlighted four categories Forman (2004) used to explain how those espousing a color-blind perspective have deemed it as valid and warranted. These “beliefs” included: Racial groups receive privileges based on merit, most people do not care about or pay attention to race, patterns of social inequity are the result of cultural deficits of individuals or racial/ethnic groups, and no systematic attention needs to be given to any existing inequities (Forman, 2004; Reason & Evans, 2007, p. 68). These beliefs set forth by Forman provide useful categories for organizing the information on color-blind racism. The next sections include an explanation of Forman’s categories and then cite writings within Whiteness studies that contested the validity of the color-blind perspective.

Racial groups receive privileges based on merit. From this color-blind perspective, anyone who has worked hard enough can have social, economic, and political benefits in American society. Feagin et al. (2001) addressed this concept as a “sincere fiction” White people have about themselves, which blinds them to their own privilege (p. 4). As a counter to

this fiction, Bonilla-Silva (2006) offered statistical evidence of the many inequalities White people had to ignore in order to believe in color-blind racism, as “Blacks and dark-skinned racial minorities lag well behind Whites in virtually every area of social life” (p. 2). Black and Latino persons do not have equal access in American society, as evidenced by receiving lower wages for comparable work, lower levels of home ownership, lesser quality of education, and the existence of racial profiling (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2). The majority of researchers on Whiteness cited in this literature review emphasized that in direct opposition to this color-blind misconception, Black persons and other persons of Color cannot *work their way out of or* overcome the systematic and oppressive structures protecting White privilege.

Most people do not care about or pay attention to race. This second color-blind perspective argued there are many signs indicating Americans have moved beyond seeing race, such as electing Barack Obama as the first biracial president and recently re-electing him, as well as the changing demographics in the United States. Neville’s “Invisibility of Race” type in the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (as cited in Helms, 2008, p. 13) corroborates this belief. As Reason and Evans (2007) suggested, color-blind racism is the “belief that ‘good’ White people can and comfortably do ignore race” (p. 73).

However, recent studies have proven White college students are indeed paying attention to race. In their book, *Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage*, Picca and Feagin (2007) presented findings from their research with over 600 White college students who composed daily “racial event” journals (p. xiv). In direct conflict to the color-blind belief that people ignore race in modern times, the researchers reported being “surprised at the large scale and frequency of the racist events recounted by the hundreds of White students as they proceeded through their everyday lives” (p. xvi). Examples provided in this research included

White students who told racist jokes, used coded and racialized language, discouraged interracial relationships, and had little more than cursory interactions with persons of Color.

In an earlier study involving White college students, Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) found White students demonstrated awareness of race and went to great lengths to avoid appearing racist in their interview responses. By using “semantic moves” and phrases like, “I am not a racist but ...”, White college students repeatedly demonstrated they were actually very conscious of race (p. 69). When interviewed in person, the majority of White students demonstrated more racist views than they had in a previously gathered written survey response. In the face-to-face interviews, White college students openly criticized Black people for their unequal place in society, opposed interracial marriage, used “othering” language, and admitted they did not have any African American friends (2000, p. 57). The participants opposed any programs to rectify racial inequality such as affirmative action for hiring or education (p. 69). This quote summarizes the extent to which the White college students in Bonilla-Silva and Forman’s 2000 study paid attention to race:

Specifically, they construe Blacks as culturally inferior: as living in a tangle of pathology. Thus, not surprisingly, most of our White respondents blamed Blacks themselves for their lower status. At best, the students felt pity for Blacks, at worst many openly expressed contempt and hostility toward Blacks. (p. 78)

Whiteness studies scholars suggested Forman’s second “belief” that people do not care about race has supported White privilege and hegemony because those who have cared and spoken about racial issues were labeled as racist or playing the race card (Doane, 2003, p. 13).

Patterns of social inequity are the result of cultural deficits of individuals or racial/ethnic groups. This way of thinking supports Forman’s first belief by stating the opposite: a person or

group can *pull themselves up by the bootstraps* if they work hard enough (example of Forman's first belief), and if they do not, the individual or group is deficient and at fault (example of Forman's third belief). This belief also aligns with Neville's work on the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale, specifically "power-evasion" which postulated "everyone has the same opportunities regardless of race" (as cited in Helms, 2008, p. 13). In their research with over 240 White individuals regarding views on racial inequality, Ditomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2003) found the color-blind belief system of blaming individuals/groups enabled participants to "direct attention away from the larger patterns of racial inequality in society" (p. 193). Bonilla-Silva (2006) countered that this belief helped White people "rationalize minorities' contemporary status" (p. 2). Examples to support this idea included White persons stating that Latino people naturally have a relaxed "manana" work ethic which explained their lower society achievements when compared to Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2). Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) renamed color-blindness as "racism blindness" and stated it "not only ignores the powerful impact that systemic White racism has on determining who is poor in the United States but damages all poor people by helping to shape this nation's response to poverty" (p. 221). Neubeck and Cazenave expressed fear that such color-blindness could affect welfare policies, and this was realized in Picca and Feagin's research with White college students who characterized Black men and women as "welfare leeches" (2007, p. 247).

No systematic attention needs to be given to any existing inequities. The fourth belief Forman identified as supporting color-blindness stated that because of the previous three beliefs, no further action was necessary to achieve equity. In essence, those who were not achieving the levels of success of Whites were to blame due to their own lack of individual efforts. Many historians and race scholars have disagreed. Omi and Winant (1994) stated, "It is not possible or

even desirable to be ‘color-blind’” (p. 159) and their sentiments are echoed in much of the Whiteness literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Helms, 2008). Reason and Evans (2007) argued color-blindness was very much alive in higher education and difficult for White students to acknowledge, but necessary to address. These authors have suggested required course work on race as well as programming to facilitate “critical” reflection on privilege (p. 73). After completing an extensive review of the literature on campus racial climates, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found the need to address inadequacies across higher education institutions. These authors argued “exclusion, institutional rhetoric rather than action, and marginality” are still very much a part of campus life (p. 214) and call for “greater transparency regarding racial realities in learning environments at predominantly White institutions” (p. 213). In her study of over 200 White university students, McKinney (2005) found Whites felt they were due “*more* preferences and advantage, because they are unfairly penalized for their race” (p. 225). This finding was consistent with a small but important segment of Whiteness studies literature that addressed Whites’ feelings of reverse discrimination. Scholars writing about this area typically addressed affirmative action as a major concern of Whites in relation to college admissions processes and hiring practices (Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000; Chesler et al., 2003; Doane, 2003; Lipsitz, 2012; Tatum, 2007). However, as several of these authors noted, reverse discrimination is uncommon and an exception to the rule of actual racial discrimination levied against People of Color.

Color-blind racism reinforces the concept that race is socially constructed. Omi and Winant (1994) stated while it might make for an “appealing ideology,” even a “cursory glance at American history reveals that far from being color-blind, the United States is an extremely ‘color conscious’ society” (p. 1). There is an abundance of research and writing in the Whiteness studies literature indicating Omi and Winant’s 1994 statement is still true almost two decades

later. Several recent studies proved the color-blind ideology was still active among college students and that the subject is worthy of further consideration (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Neville, Yeung, Todd, Spanierman, & Reed, 2011; Poteat & Spanierman, 2012; Todd, Spanierman, & Poteat, 2011).

Gaps and criticisms of research on Whiteness

Several authors have called upon the scholars in the field of sociology to better address and contribute to Whiteness studies (Andersen, 2003; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). Researchers have noted the bulk of Whiteness studies have failed to take the important sociological element of social class into account (Hartman, 2004; Kolchin, 2002), which coincided with a call for more research within in the fields of intersectionality and Whiteness. Collins (2009) explained “intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions” that “work together in producing injustice” (p. 21). Weber’s (2001) conceptual framework suggested the many possibilities for using the lens of Whiteness combined with dis/ability, class, gender, and sexual orientation to extend the current field of Whiteness studies. Considering the nature of college campuses and the availability of student participants, postsecondary educational environments provide an excellent place for future intersectional research on Whiteness to be conducted.

Several authors pointed to the lack of research on the meaning White people attach to their own racial identity (Doane, 2003; Evans et al., 2010; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Specifically, there was a call for researchers to stop asking White persons about their view of the “other” and instead ask research participants in studies direct questions to interrogate their own privilege (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Chesler et al., 2003). The current study is an attempt to contribute to this area of the field. Additionally, more research is needed outside the Black-White dichotomy—particularly related to how Latinos figure into Whiteness and the racial

privilege equation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Doane, 2003). Encompassing all of these elements and more, Twine and Gallagher (2008) requested more investigation of “the complicated meaning of Whiteness and White identities to the Hispanic/Latino populations ... particularly as it intersects with age, class, skin colour, tenure and region in the United States” (p. 14).

From a review of the Whiteness studies literature, several key criticisms emerged. A primary concern about the field was what Andersen (2003) called the “reification of Whiteness as a concept, as an experience, and as an identity” (p. 28). The danger Andersen identified was when “Whiteness has come to mean just about anything, it ends up meaning hardly anything” (p. 28). Whiteness was identified as pervasive and hegemonic in the United States, and there was concern in the field that a central focus on Whiteness would detract from addressing true racism (Andersen, 2003). This omnipresent nature of Whiteness has led to a lack of empirical studies on the topic due to the difficulty of measurement (Doane, 2003). Kolchin (2002) emphasized this last point by urging scholars to consider “historical context” and “contextual variations” in future work when examining Whiteness to ensure a full understanding of its meaning (p. 161).

Another feature of the Whiteness literature critics challenged was the autobiographical element evident in much of the work. Both Andersen (2003) and Kolchin (2002) noted the abundance of personal journey stories of Whiteness authors’ own experiences with confronting their racist history or tendencies. Andersen noted much of the work in the field “quickly devolves into highly individualized identity narratives” or “voyeuristic, ethnographic accounts of various aspects of White working-class and White popular culture” (p. 29). Instead, critics expressed a desire for analytical scholarship that addresses White privilege.

The Future of Whiteness Studies

In their 1994 book, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to 1990s*, Omi and Winant stated: “Race will *always* be at the center of the American experience” (p. 5). This statement underscores the reality that the study of Whiteness has expanded far beyond its origins in the areas of legal and cultural studies. The field of Whiteness literature continues to query the experience and effects of Whiteness on both persons who are White and persons of Color and there are multiple indications the field of Whiteness will continue to grow.

An unresolved tension debated in the Whiteness studies literature is the question of whether the study of Whiteness should be “abandoned” or directed more purposefully toward racial cognizance and the dismantling of systems of oppression (Andersen, 2003, p. 21). The nucleus of this argument is with the potential of Whiteness studies to deflect from the work of addressing racism (Doane, 2003, p. 17). Scholars such as Roediger and Ignatiev were identified as “abolitionists” who have called for an end to Whiteness (Kolchin, 2002, p. 168). Rather than eliminating or abandoning Whiteness, critical race theory (CRT) was identified as a “growing body” of Whiteness scholarship that attempts to address this tension by exposing and interrogating White privilege as it operates in modern society (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated “Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (p. 3). In response to the question of who can make the needed changes in our society, Owen (2011) said CRT “implies that responsibility for change, the responsibility to engage, challenge, unmask, disrupt, and attack the structures of Whiteness that shape *all* aspects of modern social systems, lies with each and every member of these social systems” (p. 946).

Several recent articles and writings within the field of college student development and student affairs suggested an examination of Whiteness through the lens of CRT was valid, useful, and necessary (Bondi, 2012; Evans et al., 2010, Hardiman & Keehn, 2012, p. 122).

An area of the field several scholars predicted will grow was related to the aforementioned topic of expanding the discussion of Whiteness beyond just Black and White. Twine and Gallagher (2008) discussed the likelihood that the “White category” would continue to expand and contract much in line with its history (p. 14). Kolchin (2002) saw “considerable unfulfilled potential” in the field of Whiteness, and echoed a desire to move the field beyond “a strictly binary approach to race” (172). Similarly, Ignatiev (2003) wondered “which groups will be socially White in the twenty-first century” (233).

Recent research and writings revealed White college students have engaged in racist behaviors both consciously and unconsciously (Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Reason & Evans, 2007). These and other scholars have insisted efforts are needed at the postsecondary level to require White students to interrogate and acknowledge their own privilege and racial identity so they may challenge the hegemony of Whiteness (Cabrera, 2012; Feagin & Vera, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; -Tatum, 2007; Todd et al., 2011). These authors are just a few examples of the plethora of recent studies and articles interrogating Whiteness on college campuses, suggesting continued future interest in this area of research.

The current study contributes to the research on Whiteness and the way in which White college students interpret their racial identity. A number of researchers cited the need to examine Whiteness, its oppressive structure within societal institutions such as higher education, and the policies affecting and created for these spaces. Du Bois said the following in 1920, “The

discovery of personal Whiteness is a very modern thing—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed” (p. 29). Almost a century later, there is still much to learn about the changing nature of Whiteness. As postsecondary institutions endeavor to prepare students to work in an increasing diverse world, there is ample evidence further research concerning White students is needed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature in two broad areas: college student development theory and Whiteness studies. Throughout the chapter, gaps in both bodies of literature were identified, providing justification for the current study. The next chapter delivers an explanation of the methods used in the current study in which White college students were interviewed about their race.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current study was to examine the phenomena of how White college students at Midwestern University came to understand their race. The research design is explained in this chapter and rationales are provided to support why each component was selected for this study. To design a study, Creswell (2003) proposed researchers include three “framework elements”: “philosophical assumptions about what constitutes *knowledge claims*; general procedures of research called *strategies of inquiry*; and detailed procedures of data collection, analysis, and writing called *methods*” (p. 3). These three features were used to structure and organize the beginning of this chapter.

First, I considered my own ideas and beliefs about what comprises knowledge. Creswell (2003) referred to these ideas as *knowledge claims* and explained “researchers start a project with certain assumptions about how they will learn and what they will learn during their inquiry” (p. 6). For the current study, I identified a constructivist paradigm, ontology of relativism, subjectivist epistemology, and qualitative methodology. Next, I selected the interview as the best strategy of inquiry for studying how White college students came to make sense of their race. The methods used in the study are outlined, beginning with an analysis of my background to situate myself as the researcher. Procedures for data collection, recording, analysis, and interpretation are outlined. The processes used to verify findings are provided. Finally, the format for reporting findings is explained.

Knowledge Claims

Before engaging in a study, researchers are called to identify the preconceived notions they bring to their work. Creswell calls these *knowledge claims* and explained the importance of researchers recognizing and acknowledging their thoughts and ways of viewing the world before

engaging in a study: “Philosophically, researchers make claims about what is knowledge (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), what values go into it (axiology), how we write about it (rhetoric), and the processes for studying it (methodology)” (2003, p. 6). Lincoln and Guba (2000) referred to these claims as *paradigms*. The research paradigm, ontology, epistemology, and methodology for the current study are explained in the next few paragraphs.

Constructivist Paradigm

The current study was influenced by the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). This paradigm was appropriate for my research considering Glesne’s (2006) explanation of the constructivist perspective as a theory that “maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately” (p. 7). White college students were asked to talk about their understanding of their own race so I could identify the participants’ varying interpretations of the White experience. I sought to learn how students made meaning of their race. Each description was understood as created by the participant and therefore valid and “real,” in line with a constructivist paradigm.

Relativism Ontology

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explained a researcher who believes that knowledge about the world is constructed by the individual then “assumes a relativist ontology” in which there are “multiple realities” (p. 21). This position was appropriate to the current study in which students were asked to describe their own life experiences related to race. Students spoke from a unique set of happenings and encounters, resulting in numerous representations. Each of the participant’s responses was considered as their part of their reality. Although there was difference in the reports of each White student, I accepted each of the participant’s responses as

their own experience and one of the infinite possible representations. These perspectives are in line with the “local and specific constructed realities” described by Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 165) as part of the ontology of relativism.

Subjectivist Epistemology

Epistemology describes how we come to know about the world (Glesne, 2006; Creswell, 2003). A subjectivist epistemology is assumed when using the constructivist paradigm, meaning the “knower and respondent cocreate understandings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.21). Pratt (2002) explained the subjectivist perspective as follows:

For subjectivists, we see the world as we are; which we have inside, we see outside.

Therefore, knowledge is neither a copy nor a mirror of some external reality but, rather, a construction of the individual experiencing it. People (learners) do not merely respond to the world; they impose meaning and value upon it and interpret it in ways that fit, or make sense to them. (p. 24)

Further, Jansen and Peshkin (1992) differentiated the subjective perspective by contrasting it with the objective epistemology: “Whereas objectivists assume that human beings are actors without purpose in an objective world, subjectivists see human actions as purposeful” (p. 686). In the current study, White college students who could “see” their own race were interviewed about events that led them to examine their Whiteness (Chesler et al., 2003). Students were asked to explain the meaning they attached to their race and whether any experiences in college caused them to think about being White. The subjectivist epistemology fit with the current study particularly because race is identified by many scholars as a social construction and thus, created by each individual. While an objectivist might point to the U.S. Census definition of the White race as the “right” answer, the subjectivist perspective is more concerned with the varying

definitions created by each person. For the current study, I interviewed students to discover how each participant at Midwestern University generated their own definition of being a White person in college.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology was selected as the process for study in my research for several reasons. First, I sought to discover how aware White college students at Midwestern University were of their race, the perspectives they held about their own race, and how their idea of being White had changed since they entered college. The goal of qualitative research was described by Glesne (2006) as “to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (p. 4). Second, qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Participants in this study were interviewed on their own university campus or another place of their choosing, which is considered a natural setting for them, in line with the qualitative methodology. Lastly, qualitative methods are often selected when “variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure” as opposed to a quantitative approach that attempts to calculate data explicitly and definitively (Glesne, 2006, p. 5). The concept of race has indeed been identified as multifaceted, changeable, overlapping, and problematic to assess accurately (Gunaratnam, 2003; Zuberi, 2001; Twine & Warren, 2000). Of race, James (2008) said it is “an exceedingly slippery concept. Although it appears in social life as ubiquitous, omnipresent, and real, it is hard to pin down the construct in any objective sense. This is because the idea of race is riddled with apparent contradictions” (p. 32). For these reasons, using a qualitative approach and methods for the current study was justified.

Strategy of Inquiry

The specific approach a researcher selects to investigate a phenomenon is called the strategy of inquiry. Wolcott (1992) used the analogy of a tree and demonstrated that approaches to performing qualitative research were interrelated and essentially branched out from three main roots or ways of coming to know about the world: *experiencing*, *enquiring*, and *examining* (p. 23). From these foundations, the strategies of nonparticipant and participant observation, archival research, and interviewing constituted the trunk of the tree and then formed branches that contained specific methods for accomplishing each strategy. The interview is one of the most powerful and widely used qualitative means for people to understand each other (Fontana & Frey, 2000; McCracken, 1988). Patton (1990) identified three types of interviews: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview (p.280). The current study used a combination of both the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. I developed a list of written questions for participants, but varied the sequence and wording of questions to suit each specific interview situation. Instead of using a rigid, structured interview protocol, this flexible semi-structured approach allowed me to probe and gain a deeper understanding of student responses.

Research Questions

Acknowledging the aforementioned paradigm and knowledge claims, the following research questions were created for the current study:

1. What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race?
2. For White college students who can “see” their own race, what events led to this occurrence? (Chesler et al., 2003).

The following sub-questions were used in conjunction with the questions above:

- What does it mean to White college students to be White? (e.g., How do White college students describe their experiences of race?)
- What do these students believe has shaped their ideas about race? (e.g., What types of educational and other experiences affect how White college students view their own race?)

Methods

This section contains an explanation of how I prepared for and executed my study. First, I explored my background as a preparation to conduct research. Then, the procedures I used for data collection are explained including selection of the research site and participants, and types of data collected. Data recording procedures are then described. The process I used to analyze data and interpret themes are detailed. Steps taken to validate the accuracy of my findings are provided. Finally, the reporting of findings is explained.

Background and Role of Researcher

Situating the researcher in relation to the study being undertaken is crucial as it provides the reader with valuable background information and data to judge the trustworthiness of the work. This section provides information about myself (as the sole researcher) and includes demographic characteristics, employment information, and descriptions of other experiences that may have influenced my choices, observations, and interpretations in the current study.

Throughout this section, I detailed the steps taken to ensure the soundness of the current research project.

At the time of this study, I identified as a White female, 40+ years of age, and from a working class background. I have lived within 20 minutes of Detroit, Michigan my entire life,

and have lived and worked in the City of Livonia—once identified as the “Whitest” city in the United States (Beam, 2005; Upton, 2002). For the duration of this study, I lived in Taylor, Michigan, a predominantly White, working class suburb about 10 minutes from Detroit. During the time this study was completed, I was employed in various capacities at Madonna University, a small, private, Catholic post-secondary institution located 20 minutes from the City of Detroit. I began my employment at Madonna University in 2003 as an Academic Advisor and Coordinator of Student Life, became the Director of the First-Year Experience in 2005, the Associate Dean for Academic Advising and the First-Year Experience in 2007, and then became the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and co-director of the graduate studies program in higher education/student affairs in August 2014. In addition to being an employee of Madonna University, I also earned a Bachelor of Arts, teaching certificate, and Master of Arts degree there. My work as an adjunct instructor teaching first-year seminars as well as graduate courses provided me with many opportunities to incorporate service-learning into my courses, and I have conducted these projects in Southwest Detroit since 2003. Since 2007, I have been pursuing a doctoral degree in higher, adult, and lifelong education (HALE) at Michigan State University. My cognate area of study was sociology in which I completed courses related to race politics and social structure; intersections of race, class, and gender; and gender and power. The sum of these experiences allowed me to formulate insightful study questions and have a deep understanding of students experiencing higher education, yet also may have influenced my ideas and interpretations within the current study.

During the 2011 – 2012 academic year, I participated in an educational experience called, “Race, Dis/ability and Class: Confronting Interlocking Privilege and Oppression” which was funded by a grant for Creating Inclusive Excellence by the Office of Inclusion at Michigan State

University. As a part of this intensive immersion experience, I lived with 20 other graduate students from Michigan State University for three weekends (six days) exploring the intersections of racism, ableism, and classism. I received training from Allies for Change, a network of “educators and activists who share a passion for social justice and a commitment to creating and sustaining life-giving ally relationships and communities” (Allies for Change website). In 2014, I completed a six-day training sponsored by Allies for Change entitled, “Doing Our Own Work: A Seminar for Anti-Racist White People”. These 45 hours of class time involved reading about and discussing racism and White privilege, forming an anti-racist identity, receiving ally training, practice with interrupting racism, and developing a project to make institutional change. I consider myself constantly on the journey of becoming and remaining an anti-racist White person dedicated to exposing privilege and eliminating oppression as a result of race, class, gender, ability status, and sexual orientation—particularly within higher education. At times, I struggled during this study because I wanted to challenge students’ responses in a more direct way or share resources to educate them about their privilege.

The current qualitative study used interviews of White college students at Midwestern University (a pseudonym) conducted during the Summer 2014, Fall 2014, and Spring 2015 academic semesters. Additionally, I completed a pilot study during the Winter 2013 semester at Madonna University to inform and guide the study at Midwestern University. For this study, I conducted face-to-face interviews with students. The interview is “not a neutral tool” and as a method, it is “influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity, and gender” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 633). As the sole researcher for this study, I completed all of the interviews. My demographic characteristics and employment experiences could have influenced my views and perceptions in this study. Steps I took to acknowledge and

mitigate potential biases are detailed later in this section. The aforementioned background characteristics may have informed my actions and decisions as a researcher, and it is important to recognize their possible influence on the current study. McCracken (1988) emphasized the significance of this process of identifying “one’s own deeply embedded cultural assumptions” as a researcher. As a result, “This clearer understanding of one’s own vision of the world permits a critical distance from it” (pp. 33-34).

The next sections identify the careful steps taken for the collection of data to ensure participant responses were represented in their own words.

Procedures for Data Collection

In this section, the data collection procedures used for the current study are described. Janesick (2000) stated “Qualitative research requires the researcher to become the research instrument” (p. 386). Rationales are provided for the choices I made related to site selection, participant selection, and the types of data collected. The strengths and weaknesses of these many research decisions are highlighted within each section.

The current study was reviewed and approved by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, the pilot study used to inform and shape this research was approved by the Madonna University Human Subjects Research Committee (HSRC). All participants were informed of their rights in advance of interviews. Students were notified they could stop the interview at any time and request their responses not be used in the current study. Participants were invited to partake in the study via an invitation sent to their university email address. All students in the current study were assured their responses would be kept confidential and pseudonyms of their own choice would be used in all notes and recordings.

Students were encouraged to provide honest responses, ask clarifying questions, and told they had the option to decline to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

Site selection. Midwestern University (a pseudonym) was selected as the site for this study for several reasons. First, Midwestern University had a student body of almost 9,000 students in which over 65% of students identified as White during the Fall of 2013 (NCES, 2014b). This provided a sizeable pool of students from which to recruit participants. A second reason Midwestern University was selected is that it is a regional public university located close to Detroit, Michigan. Previously in this section, it was noted Livonia, Michigan was identified recently as the Whitest city in the United States. The Metropolitan Detroit area—specifically the cities of Livonia, Detroit, and Dearborn—was named the most racially segregated region in the United States with large populations of Whites in Livonia, African Americans in Detroit, and Arab Americans in Dearborn (Logan & Stults, 2011; U.S. Census, 2000). Midwestern University provided a unique place to poll White students living in one of the most racially separated communities in the country about their experiences related to race. A third reason Midwestern University was selected as the site for study was because it is a mid-sized campus where the overwhelming majority of students live in the most segregated urban area in the United States and commute to campus. The uniqueness of the research location provides a compelling contribution to the conversation about how White students conceive of their own race. Additionally, the research that influenced this study had been done primarily with either sizable populations of residential undergraduate students of traditional college-going age, and graduate students, or at large state and research institutions (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; McKinney, 2005; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Midwestern University provided access to a large number of commuter students and a high number of non-traditionally aged students. Lastly,

when approached about the feasibility of the current study, Midwestern University welcomed my interest in conducting research on campus and encouraged me to connect with several key faculty and staff for assistance.

Participant selection. Participants for the current study were recruited intentionally using a multi-stage process. Through a colleague, I was referred to a faculty member at Midwestern University who is the director of a program serving a large number of students. I created an email invitation that explained the goal of my research (See Appendix B) and asked my contact to send it to students who could provide helpful information for the study. In July 2014, she sent an invitation to students served by her office, and to faculty and staff contacts in several other resource centers and student support and engagement offices on campus. Four students also shared the email invitations with their peers attending the same institution. From this initial round of invitations, over 100 students were invited to participate in my study. I received 11 emails from interested students whom I then sent an email questionnaire (See Appendix B).

Since my focus was to interview students who identified as White, the questionnaire I sent asked students to identify their race among other demographic variables such as major and age. All of the questionnaire responses I received were from students who selected “Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic)” as their race. Additionally, I included the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale – Revised (ORAS-R) with permission of the copyright owner. This instrument consisted of 21 statements used to determine a participant’s racial consciousness using several measures: racial acceptance (one bi-polar scale – Dominative/Integrative) and racial justice (2 scales – Conflictive; Reactive). Students were asked to indicate their feelings about each statement using a scale of 1 for *Strongly Disagree* to 5 for *Strongly Agree*. I scored each

questionnaire using the ORAS-Revised Basic Conceptual and Scoring Information guide (Vandiver & Leach, 2005) used with permission by the copyright holder. To provide a variety of responses for consideration during the data analysis phase, I selected seven students across the three scales to interview. During the Summer 2014 and Fall 2014 semesters, I interviewed each of these students two times.

To increase the number of participants in my study, I requested the program director at Midwestern University send out a second invitation to participate in December 2014. This time, she sent the invitation to approximately 110 students—some of whom may have received the initial invitation. Twelve students replied with interest and I sent them the same questionnaire sent to the first group of students recruited. After scoring this second batch of interested students, I selected three students whose scores on the ORAS-R Dominative/Integrative and Reactive scales were higher than those of the students I had interviewed from the first round. My purpose in selecting these students was to focus the bulk of my study on students who might be able to “see” their own race and some of the privilege experienced by White persons, as this was an area of need noted during my literature review. I also attempted to select a diverse pool of participants who represented a variety of majors, academic standings, and housing statuses (e.g., on-campus or off-campus). I found three students who helped round out my participant population. I interviewed these last three students two times during January 2015, bringing the total number of participants in my study to 10 intentionally selected students. A detailed profile of each participant is included in Chapter Four of this document.

Types of data collected: Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the current study. As the name implies, semi-structured interviews have some form, but also allow the interviewer to be flexible and adapt to the participant. Structured interviews focus on

replicating a formal interview process by ensuring all participants receive the same questions in the same manner, with little room for open-ended questions or deviation from the interview protocol. Consequently, unstructured interviews involve broad and general ideas and questions with few rules and expectations for the meeting of researcher and respondent. Fontana and Frey (2000) demarcated the opposing collection methods of structured and unstructured interviewing as follows:

The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry. (p. 653)

The space in between these terms is that of the semi-structured interview. Patton (1990) explained approaches to interviewing range from very informal to highly standardized based on the amount of preparation of questions and procedures the interviewer does in advance of meeting with participants. For the current study, I developed a list of questions that guided the direction of the interview (see Appendix A). However, if a participant's response went outside of these questions, I allowed this digression and noted it. I did not establish a coding system for responses prior to interviewing and instead documented participant replies as they occurred to allow for the broadest range of responses. In many cases, I asked for clarification of words, phrases, and given answers to better understand the intent of the participant. This approach was in line with the general interview guide approach described by Patton (1990).

Interviews were conducted in various locations of the participants' choice. I met with students on campus at Midwestern University in the library and a conference room, off campus at a local coffee shop and restaurant, and at one student's home. Participants were asked via

email where they preferred to meet and I negotiated based on needs for the interviews (e.g., a space without too much background noise where the student would feel comfortable answering questions). Participant preference was a priority to provide a natural setting for the interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized the value of researchers observing and interviewing participants in their normal, ordinary environment “because phenomena of study, whatever they may be—physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological—*take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves*” (p. 189). During the initial meeting, I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study as well as the rights of the participants, and attempted to ask all questions included in the Interview Protocol (Appendix A). After each initial interview, I reviewed the data collected and determined what sort of clarification and follow-up questions needed to be asked. At the second interview, I shared the first interview transcript, asked follow-up questions, and queried the participants if they had any more information to contribute to the study.

Interviewing as a practice of data gathering is both beneficial and limited. Through the interview, researchers can obtain information from participants without direct observation of the phenomenon being studied, clarify responses and interpretations immediately, and direct the flow of questions and conversation (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Interviews can provide different information and data than surveys as shown in the work of Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) who found White college students “exhibited more prejudiced views in the interview than in their survey responses” (pp. 75-76). These researchers compared data gathered from a 20 page survey with data from a 2 hour interview and found the results to be different and compelling.

Many difficulties can be encountered while interviewing and are noted as limitations of the technique. By reporting their own opinions and experiences, participants' responses are "filtered through" their own interpretations (Creswell, 2007, p. 186). Likewise, the interviewer may misunderstand the responses of interviewees, or not be skillful to ask high-quality questions that evoke substantive responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). A researcher can influence the responses of participants either by virtue of who they are (e.g., gender, age, race, role, etc.) or through action and language. A number of scholars have noted the race of the interviewer has had an effect on interviewee responses (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Gunaratnam, 2003; McKinney, 2005; Twine, 2000). Due to the "unstable quality of White identity" (p. 93), Blee (2000) noted White "researchers can simultaneously be 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to the culture and meaning-systems of those they seek to study" when interviewing White participants (p. 108). In her work studying White supremacists, Blee found interviewees saw her as outside of their group which slowed her progress but also led to participants explaining their ideas about race in "intricate ways" that benefitted her study. Similarly, McKinney (2005) emphasized the potential benefits of White interviewers working with same-race participants: "An indigenous, 'insider' perspective can be used to gain different insights into data than would come from an outsider's perspective. Especially in Whiteness studies, the indigenous perspective can be a useful resource" (p. xix). Having an awareness of these potential challenges helped me better prepare for my own interviews. Many times during the over 20 hours of interviewing conducted, I paused based on the response of participants and then asked them for clarification or more details about what they had just said. My intention was to better understand their meaning and mitigate the potential interviewing issues noted in this section.

Procedures for Data Recording

Before any data were collected for my study, I spent a significant amount of time considering how to best obtain useable data and the necessary steps to ensure participant confidentiality. The methods used for recording data in the current study included audio recordings, transcripts, interviewer notes, and writings in a reflective research journal. Each of these methods for documenting the research is discussed in more detail in this section and I address steps taken to maintain confidentiality throughout.

Interviews began with an explanation of the purpose of the interview and participants were provided with a paper copy of the Research Participant Information and Consent Form (included in Appendix C of this document). Students were asked if they understood the form and had any questions. After answering questions, I asked the interviewees to sign two duplicate copies of the form. One copy was provided to the participant and I kept the other for documentation purposes. None of the participants I met with for interviews declined participation at this point, although I informed them they could end the interview at any time without any ramifications. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym, which I noted separately from the consent form. Consent forms were filed at my home in a locked storage cabinet and all subsequent documentation, notes, and audio recordings involving the participant used the alias chosen.

Each interview was digitally recorded using three handheld devices to ensure capture of information. All participants agreed to be audio recorded for both of their interviews. Each participant's body language and facial expressions were noted in handwritten field notes during the interviews. Immediately following questioning, I made field notes in a notebook about observable interviewee behaviors and other relevant thoughts related to the interview. Within a

few hours of each interview, back-up copies of files were saved on an external hard drive and on a flash drive with password protection. Within three weeks of each interview, I created a transcript of the interview. After the initial transcript was made, I listened to the recording slowly two times while reviewing the transcripts and made corrections to quality check my work. During the second interview, I provided participants with a paper copy of the first interview transcript and asked them to review it. All of the students approved their transcripts without correction. Then, I asked follow-up questions I created during the transcription process based on student responses from the first interview. The majority of these questions were to seek clarity about answers students had given, to ask students to expand on a vague or brief answer, or to ask about an emerging theme I noted in my data. Finally, I asked participants if they had any more information that might be useful for my study. Students were offered the option to review the transcript of this second interview, but all 10 participants declined, with several stating the first transcript looked accurate.

Throughout the data collection process, I kept a reflective research journal. Glesne (2006) indicated the value of making such analytical and autobiographical notes:

They become a means for thinking about how the research is cocreated among you and research participants; how each of your actions and interactions shape what follows.

They sometimes become a place to vent or express frustration and then, through continued writing, to better understand those emotions and derive more questions or devise new strategies. (p. 60)

This reflective journal differed from the field notes made during and after interviews. Rather than focusing specifically on the responses of participants, the journal was used as a place to contemplate the larger significance of the current study. Notes were made about my personal

progress as a researcher, reactions to participant responses, and feelings about the study.

Together, the field notes and reflective research journal assisted me in planning for, responding to, and analyzing information gathered in the current study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

From the data recorded for the current study, several methods were used to make meaning of the information. Words and phrases in interview transcripts were analyzed in a variety of ways. Each of these techniques is explained below and the rationale for selection provided.

Analyzing words is part of what Ryan and Bernard (2000) identified as network or structural analysis. Noting the frequency and timing of word choice across participant responses can “produce information that engenders deeper interpretations of the meanings in the original corpus of qualitative data” (p.777). Each interview transcript was reviewed numerous times and repeated words and phrases were noted in a spreadsheet. The number of times participants used various words or phrases and in what order was tracked. Key words and phrases were highlighted and analyzed through examination of the statements made before and after the highlighted these key words and phrases, which provided additional ideas about the data.

Related to the use of words and phrases, an important consideration for the current study is the emerging field of discourse analysis. There is a body of knowledge that has explored the ways in which participants have used language when discussing race during interviews (Myers & Williamson, 2001; Van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). A number of studies have identified significant linguistic patterns used by White persons when discussing race and racism, particularly White college students. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) identified a number of “discursive maneuvers and ‘semantic moves’” used by college students to “avoid

direct racial discourse” (p. 50). These authors also noted pauses and stuttering behaviors among interviewees. Picca and Feagin (2007) called these language cues “verbal mechanisms” and include whispering, purposely vague language, and code words as linguistic markers. White college students have been noted to use phrases such as, “I am not a racist, but ...” when discussing their own race and that of other racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000) While analyzing the transcripts of the current study, I looked for several of these conventions and noted the placement and frequency with which they occurred, which helped highlight areas that required further analysis.

I reviewed transcripts from each interview and identified themes and areas that emerged as significant, redundant, or curious. To better analyze themes, I created a spreadsheet including individual worksheets for each of the 19 questions from the first interview. All 10 participants’ related answers were included in each worksheet by question so I might analyze the information for patterns across each interview question. I created key words or codes that captured what students had said or what I had thought of when reading their answers. I also entered participants’ responses for the second interview into separate worksheets within this spreadsheet and then searched the entire document for specific words and phrases. Next, I created a list of 133 codes I felt emerged from participants’ responses. I reviewed the list of codes, grouped them by similar ideas, refined those ideas into a rough outline, and began listing possible themes. Then, I reviewed the data again and created a table, including examples of participants’ words to support each element of my outline and the various themes that emerged. At this point, I made choices to combine and eliminate themes, reducing my list of themes from over 30 to four main themes with multiple supporting ideas. I made notes and used visuals to depict the concepts and my thinking, and then I refined those ideas further. Throughout my various approaches to collect

and analyze data, I continually made attempts to explain, explore, negate, compare, and contrast the findings. Woods (1992) referred to this process as “comparative analysis” and emphasized the value of this method for qualitative researchers (p.386). Lastly, findings and results were documented in a written format.

Validating the Accuracy of Findings

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated the following criteria must be satisfied when discussing the validity of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A discussion of each of these terms and their handling in the current study follows. These rationales are provided to prove trustworthiness in the research conducted.

Credibility. Researchers completing qualitative studies operate from a foundational belief that there are always multiple understandings of the phenomenon being studied (Janesick, 2000). As such, a researcher must provide evidence of steps taken to ensure the integrity of work in order for readers to believe the resulting interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several “techniques” for establishing credibility in qualitative research including triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (p. 219). Each of these elements is discussed in this section.

Triangulation was defined as the use of a variety of means for collecting data related a particular idea or argument (Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In the current study, the concept of triangulation was implemented in several ways. First, I asked faculty and staff for nominations of students for the study. A brief questionnaire was distributed to potential participants to collect demographic information. Interviews were conducted with a variety of students who identified as White, resulting in multiple transcripts for examination and evaluation. Participants were interviewed at least twice, providing several opportunities to

collect data, explore ideas, and clarify interpretations. These deliberate activities yielded ideas that served as alternative explanations for initial interpretations made.

In addition to triangulation, peer debriefing was used as a technique for ensuring credibility in the current study. Peer debriefing was identified as a strategy to “enhance the accuracy of the account” provided by the researcher (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Two individuals working at higher education institutions outside of Midwestern University were identified and met me periodically throughout the study. During these meetings, these peers reviewed findings, discussed interpretations, and provided alternate understandings of the research. Marshall and Rossman (1995) called this role a “devil’s advocate” and noted its usefulness as a control in qualitative research (p. 145).

Another strategy used to increase credibility was member checking. This technique was defined as “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). Member checking is cited by multiple scholars as a strong way to ensure validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003; Janesick, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In the current study, transcripts of the first interview were provided to all participants for review during their second interview, which created an opportunity to clarify and better understand the participants’ responses. Students were invited to meet with me to review the transcripts of their second interviews as well, and to offer comment and feedback.

Transferability. To understand the category of transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the researcher consider “the degree to which the findings of an inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents” (p.218). The judgment of transferability is ultimately the decision of the readers, who must determine how they feel

comfortable making a comparison of the study in question to other contexts based on the data and rationales provided. Two methods for developing transferability in qualitative research studies include triangulation and the use of “concepts and models” to develop the direction of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 144). Examples of both of these ideas are evident in the current study. The previous section contained a discussion of the types and range of data collected to provide triangulation. A review of existing White racial identity models and the field of Whiteness studies provided in the literature review for this study guided the direction for this study. I read research that focused on how White college students experienced race, which influenced the questions included in the interview protocol and provided possible explanations for participant responses. Thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219) was also suggested as a way to strengthen transferability and was used in the reporting of findings within the current document. Collectively, these efforts were made to increase the transferability of the research.

Dependability. Proving dependability can be challenging due to the nature and assumptions inherent in the qualitative research method. Marshall and Rossman (1995) explained this construct as that “in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (p. 145). I embarked upon the current study knowing the participants’ concept of race would be fluid and dynamic, as would many other aspects of their identity as college students. Acknowledgement of constant change led me to develop interview questions carefully and make field notes judiciously in an effort to detail participant responses. After each interview, I reviewed my interview protocol, reflected on the answers provided by the most recent interviewee and previous respondents, and determined additional questions for the second interview based on my evolving knowledge of how White

college students explain their own race. Practices such as auditing and accounting for decisions made were recommended as additional proofs of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The use of an external auditor provides increased validity in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 2006). An external auditor reviewed documents and procedures midway through the current study and after the findings were reported. At both times, this individual reviewed field notes, interview transcripts and narratives and provided feedback about process and conclusions.

Confirmability. Instead of the “positivist criteria” of objectivity, a constructivist paradigm utilizes the term confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.21). In essence, this proof requires the researcher to show evidence that the “findings of the study could be confirmed by another” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). Several of the strategies already described (including the use of an external auditor and peer debriefers) provides assurance that the current study demonstrated confirmability. Careful documentation of processes and practices followed is another way to strengthen confirmability. In the current study, I kept detailed and organized records, which led to the external auditor and peer debriefers having a thorough understanding of the design and confirming my results.

Chapter Summary

The current study explored the interpretations of White college students who could “see” their own race. In order to perform this research at Midwestern University, I carefully considered my own biases, determined the optimal site and pool of participants, and selected methods that yielded accurate data. Data collection involved making audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes of interviews. Interview transcripts and notes were analyzed and interpreted. A reflective research journal provided valuable insights about the progress of the

project. Initial ideas were then validated against the constructive proofs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Findings were then represented in this written report.

CHAPTER FOUR: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In order to contextualize the information provided, this chapter includes a profile of each participant interviewed for this study. Ten participants were chosen at Midwestern University because they met the criteria of identifying as White college students currently enrolled in courses, were willing to complete the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale – Revised (ORAS-R), and agreed to be interviewed twice about their racial identity. Within the description about each participant, the following data are provided as background information: name (pseudonym selected by interviewee), other institutions attended prior to Midwestern University (pseudonyms selected by interviewer), age, gender, program of study, demographic information about neighborhoods and primary/secondary schools attended, and socioeconomic status as revealed directly and indirectly. All of the contributors in my study were willing to share many details about their life through telling stories, particularly the non-traditionally aged college students who talked at length about their lives outside of college. Meaningful details and quotes are included in the descriptions that follow in an attempt to create a vivid portrait of each participant. The participants' summaries are provided in alphabetical order.

Students were selected for interviews based on their ORAS-R scores, at first to provide representation from each of the four types of White racial consciousness described by Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) and then to increase the number of students who identified as Integrative, the type which depicted a higher level of comfort with and acceptance of persons of Color (Vandiver & Leach, 2005). While I tried to identify students who could recognize and describe what it meant to be White for this study, the ORAS-R was not designed to measure or indicate that dimension. Students with high Integrative scores were chosen because they were tolerant of other races and also conceptualized their own race despite its prevalence in society.

The descriptions that follow include a narrative about each participant within my sample and then explain how each scored on the ORAS-R, as this tool was used as a lens through which to interpret and make sense of the results. The ORAS-R is a 21 statement instrument with a five-point answer scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Once scored, the questionnaire results in three subscale scores that relate to either racial acceptance or racial justice. Within racial acceptance, the scale is described as “bi-polar” (Vandiver & Leach, 2005, p.1) with lower scores indicating a Dominative or negative identity and a higher score indicating an Integrative identity. The racial justice scale contains scores for both Conflictive and Reactive types. This is not a bi-polar scale, and both types were considered to understand the participants’ attitudes toward race. For these two scales, a higher score suggested an individual showed more evidence of being that type. Also, the ORAS-R scores provided only represent how participants were thinking on the day they completed the survey. A person’s attitude can change due to experiences and events (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002) and therefore, their type may fluctuate based on life encounters and occurrences. Although the ORAS-R is intended to be used with larger sample sizes (M.M. Leach, personal communication, November 23, 2013), the tool was useful because it assisted me in selecting students to interview, provided me with a way to diversify my sample, helped me ask deeper, richer questions of my participants, and provided triangulation among the survey and two interview responses.

Abigail

Abigail was 18 years of age and a first-year, full-time student who was in her second semester at Midwestern University at the time of our interview. She was in the process of changing her major to biology with a minor in psychology, and said she was pre-med. Abigail lived in the campus apartments and did not work while attending college. She said her hobbies

included running and riding horses, and she identified as middle class. Abigail described herself as “very studious” and said she loved learning, studying, and being in school—which she felt meant she was “not the norm”. She was the youngest student in my study.

The oldest of five children, Abigail said she was a family person, but needed to move away from home because she needed some quiet. Prior to attending Midwestern University, Abigail lived in a rural area about an hour from campus. She said her high school and neighborhood were “95% White”. Abigail said her mother’s father was an engineer at a major automotive corporation and this meant Abigail’s mother lived in many places outside of the United States, including Japan, Mexico, and Indonesia. Abigail described with fondness that her mother was a pre-school teacher at the time of our interview, which meant Abigail had opportunities to visit her mother’s classroom with a large population of students she said were Latino. Regarding her own background, Abigail said, “I’m like a third Irish, and then German, French, and just different European”.

When reviewing Abigail’s scores on the ORAS-R, she had the second highest score (28) in my participant pool on the Integrative scale, indicating her racial acceptance score was only two points away from the maximum of 30. She selected *Strongly Agree* for the statement “I don’t mind being one of the few Whites in a group of minority people” and selected *Strongly Disagree* for the statement, “I don’t want to deal with minorities because they are different in ways that I don’t like.” These answers prior to our interview were consistent with Abigail’s responses during the interview, and particularly when she talked about being raised in a “non-discriminatory” family where her mother and father would have helped persons of any race. Abigail said she hoped to have roommates of other races at Midwestern University and was disappointed when she discovered this was not the case during her first year. Throughout both

interviews, she expressed interest and openness toward learning about her classmates who were racially, ethnically, or culturally different. Abigail talked with particular enthusiasm about students she described as Arab American and Middle Eastern at Midwestern University and provided several examples of her interactions with these classmates.

April

April was a full-time graduate student in her second year at Midwestern University and was 23 years old when we met for interviews. April was working toward a master's degree in teaching with a Spanish major and English minor, and she hoped to teach high school or English overseas when she graduated. April said she was born in Detroit and lived there for a few years, but now lived with her mother in a suburb nearby. She said her dad was “not in my life anymore” but described how he had been a primary force in shaping her awareness and interest in cultures, religions, and people as a child. Several times during the interview, April identified as lower middle class, stating her mother made “a good living” but she raised April as a single parent. She also described feeling out of place at the first college she attended for her undergraduate degree because she felt “poor” there, but was not quite eligible for scholarship or grant assistance.

April attended a variety of Catholic schools before high school, and said because of this, she thought “everybody was Catholic”. She said she quickly realized when she started attending public high school that there were many other religions and faiths. Although there were few persons of Color in her primary and secondary schools, April said she befriended many of these students easily and identified her friends at that time as African American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and bi-racial. Although her high school was predominantly White, April choose to make friends with students of other races. Her best friend was “a Christian from Jordan.” She said, “I

noticed, my friend group changed and I was friends with a lot of bi-racial African American students.” Having a diverse group of friends in high school led April to leave her first university, which she described as “very White, very conservative, very um ... wealthy. And I didn’t feel like I fit in there, because I wasn’t used to it.” April transferred to an urban institution in Detroit, which she said, “was a complete opposite. I was a minority ...” Although the website for this institution indicated only 41% of the student body were students of Color at the time April referenced, she said she felt like the only White person in her residence hall. She said,

I lived on campus for a year, um, and ... I felt like ... I was the only White person that lived in my building, which isn’t true. But I felt like it. And, um, I felt like everybody was staring at me, because I stuck out.

April also described hearing Black men make “cat calls” at her often while on campus. She told me she had been the victim of several acts of violence perpetrated by African American men prior to attending college and while at the institution in Detroit. She explained these events had “turned her off” to African American culture. She explained, “I’ve had more experiences than I could count, um, negative experiences ...um ... (long pause) that turned me off to it.”

At the time of our interviews, April shared she was in a relationship with another student at Midwestern who was African American. She said while her family was “very accepting” of him, his family did not accept her. When I asked how she felt about being rejected by her boyfriend’s family, April said her mother was concerned a few years ago that people would criticize April and make life hard for her as a result of interracial dating. However, she said now, “...my mom doesn’t feel like she needs to be as protective because society has changed.” However, April said her boyfriend’s family did not receive her warmly nor had they treated her with any kindness. She said she often had conversations with him about, “...the stigma of both,

like, the stereotypes of both races a lot because um, it's important." April said her boyfriend wanted to work for a non-profit and they both wanted to work with children. She said, "...we talk a lot about what we can do to ... tear down those stereotypes and what we can do, um, to ... combat the ... stigmas that are already there." As a result of feeling society in the United States was so racially focused and violently charged, April said she and her boyfriend had often discussed moving out of the country because they perceived other countries as more open minded and tolerant of racial differences.

April's responses on the ORAS-R and in her interviews reflected her uncertainty and changing ideas about race. Her score on the Dominative/Integrative scale placed her in the middle within my sample, indicative of her vacillation related to racial acceptance. She scored low related to other participants on the Conflictive scale, selecting *Strongly Disagree* for the following statements: "About all that is necessary to achieve racial equality in the U.S. has been done" and "Over the past few years the government has paid more attention to minority concerns than they deserve." While she did not think persons of Color unfairly benefit more from American society than White persons, April also did not think being White meant having a responsibility toward "minorities" (ORAS-R question # 5). April responded *Neither Agree nor Disagree* when presented with the statement, "Whites have an unfair advantage over minorities." Throughout April's interview, she seemed to fluctuate between feeling pain due to recent negative interactions with a few African American men and women and knowing she needed to heal those wounds in order to be true to her deeply held values and nature of accepting all persons. She knew moving forward was particularly important for her chosen career of education, and she was visibly working through her struggle.

Faith

My interviews with Faith took place in a conference room near where she worked full-time at Midwestern University. Faith identified herself in response to the study email invitation by saying, “I am not the ‘traditional’ student. I am 37 and returning to school and only taking 6 credit hours and work a full-time day job.” Faith was pursuing a bachelor’s degree in general studies with concentrations in psychology, communication, and philosophy after being away from school for a number of years. She earned an associate’s degree at a community college in Illinois and then moved to Michigan in 1999. She intended to continue her education right away but said the “golden handcuffs” of being employed and earning money kept her from re-enrolling until recently.

Although Faith lived in a working class suburb that bordered Detroit, she grew up in a small, rural town of about 250 persons in Southern Illinois. She described her grade school as having only 12 people in class, and said, “I’ve felt very sheltered kind of growing up in, in that way.” She noted her family was traditional and somewhat religious, but more “open minded” than many other families in that area where she said, “there’s still people that fly the confederate flag in front of their house.” Faith said growing up, she had cousins from “a mixed marriage.” Of this, she said, “I’m very lucky in the fact that my family was very supportive ... I’ve never dwelled on those differences.” She mentioned learning about “new things” from her siblings, with Faith being the youngest of four children. Although her family attended Christian religious services on Sunday mornings and evenings, Faith enjoyed reading about Buddhism as a child and said, “I always felt like an old hippie soul (laugh).” Faith said she had always had strong feelings about “women’s equality and other races and other religions.” She also said being a non-traditional student had the benefit of meaning she was much more comfortable with herself

as a person than she was when younger. “I’ve had a lot of time to, do soul searching and figure out who I am.”

Moving to the Detroit area was “interesting” for Faith due to the fact she found it to be very divided along racial lines. In her travels in and around the city, she noted sharp contrasts between areas related to race, socioeconomic status, and location. She attributed this division to racism: “Well, yeah, it does kind of go back to racism and the fact that some people had more privilege than others...” Faith said from speaking with her husband’s family members, who had grown up in the area, she learned Detroit and the suburbs had not fully recovered from the “race riots” that had occurred in the late 1960s. Her sense was “a lot of healing” still needed to be done. One area she identified as particularly lacking and contributing to the divide was public transportation, which she heard was unreliable and resulted in many persons in her neighborhood using bicycles in moderate weather.

Faith talked about struggling to complete the ORAS-R due to wanting to “qualify and defend my answers,” which she said she “didn’t expect at first”. Faith’s score on the Dominative/Integrative scale was the highest in the sample (29), which is consistent with the openness and acceptance I observed during our interviews. The only statement within this scale Faith did not allot the maximum score to was, “I am comfortable with my non-racist attitude toward minorities.” She scored this as *Somewhat Agree* and after our two interviews, I found evidence Faith’s mindset was one of constantly learning and being open to new information. She did demonstrate a non-racist attitude during our interviews, and also displayed an authentic assessment of her limited life experiences, wanting to improve her knowledge and understanding of all persons with whom she interacted.

John

John was a 21-year-old student majoring in communications with tracks in journalism and screen studies when we met. He said he declared this major within the last year, and was not really sure what he wanted to do after college or with his life. John was a full-time student who lived with his parents and was not employed while in college. He was proud of the fact he had received a scholarship he described as “pretty much a full-ride,” which he said was based on his grade point average in high school and ACT scores. While he mentioned he was “not too active socially” on campus, John did mention being involved in one student organization for social reasons. Instead of participating in events on campus, John said he and his friends mostly met off campus. But he said for the most part, “I mostly stick to myself.”

Of his neighborhood now and while growing up, John said it was “pretty much all White.” He attended public elementary schools through fourth grade with “people like me” and then transferred to a charter school system through high school. John described this academy as “a bit more diversified” and said he had “a couple friends who were Indian and ... Black friends, I had a few people. But yeah, it was majority White.”

When I asked about any family discussions John remembered about being White, he said his mother talked about their family having European ancestry and his father said, “We are German.” John was largely unsatisfied with this answer and expressed curiosity about how his ancestors came to the United States. Then rather abruptly, John told me “some aspects of my family members can be a bit racist, too.” He explained his father worked in factories all his life and had negative experiences with persons of other races. While John did not specifically name which other races he was referring to, he then told me a story about his father being upset and complaining about an interaction with a Black man at a sporting event. Several times across

both interviews, John seemed guarded when he told me he disagreed with this father's racist comments and remarks but could and would not intervene because "it's hard to get past old identities or old ideas." John felt his father was wrong, but I also observed John's responses were heavily influenced by being raised in an intolerant environment.

On the ORAS-R, John's Conflictive score was near the higher end of my sample, suggesting he was opposed to programs benefitting those who are not White. The majority of his responses to Conflictive statements were *Neither Agree nor Disagree* which indicated he was not willing to commit either way. However, John scored among the lowest of participants related to the reactive type. He responded *Strongly Disagree* to each of the following statements: "Being White gives us a responsibility toward minorities" and "Sometimes, I feel guilty about being White when I think about all the bad things Whites have done to minorities" and "I believe that it's society's responsibility to help minority people whether they want it or not." What was interesting about John's responses is while he told me he really enjoyed participating in the study and answering my questions, there was a general uneasiness in his demeanor—almost as if he were betraying his father by telling me about his intolerance and bigotry. At the same time, John seemed relieved to be telling me about his feelings and frustration with his father. The theme of participants in my study feeling confused or frustrated with their family members' racial attitudes is addressed further in Chapter 5.

Kimberly

The interviews with Kimberly were the longest in my study. Although my consent form suggested the total time across both interviews would take approximately 75-90 minutes of time, I spent almost three hours talking with Kimberly and she wanted to talk more. Kimberly was 21 years old when we met and an industrial engineering and chemistry major. She said she felt this

combination of focus areas was perfect because it would enable her to understand how the world works, make it better, and make it more streamlined. She was a fourth year senior and full-time student with a manufacturing engineering internship at a firm that created climate control systems for large automotive companies. The internship was an eye-opening experience for Kimberly because she said she was not a mechanical person and was working with a lot of men who she said were her father's age—which was also new for her. She said, “So, I'm just working with a bunch of dads (laugh)!” Aside from her studies, Kimberly described herself as the “quintessential nerd” who loved learning and documentaries.

Kimberly grew up and lived in a suburb located about 30 minutes from Detroit for her entire life. She said she believed all of the students in her Catholic primary and middle schools lived within 20 minutes of the school and “everyone was White, middle class kids from the area”. She said the classes were small and “everybody kind of knew each other”. Kimberly went to a small, Catholic, all girls' college preparatory high school nearby where she said there was “not a whole lot of diversity”. Of her family, Kimberly said her mother was a first generation American, with grandparents from Germany and Hungary who did not speak English and “don't really get what it means to be American.” While her mother was born in the United States, she traveled frequently to other countries because her grandfather was a physician who participated in Doctors without Borders, an international humanitarian organization. She described her family being very active in the cultural groups affiliated with her ancestry and her grandfather's friends who were also a part of these groups. Kimberly noted she identified closely with the values of her immigrant grandparents, which her family saw as different than the typical culture of “White American people” as she described it. She said her relatives' idea of becoming an adult meant, “taking a larger role in the family” and “becoming more of a provider

and less of a dependent for the family”. Kimberly said the typical White American idea of being an adult was “more this idea of complete independence” which she said she struggled with based on her upbringing, which was heavily influenced by her grandparents’ ideals and values.

Kimberly said she felt different than most of her White classmates at Midwestern University who could stay out late and travel to other friends’ houses without meeting their family members first.

Kimberly’s answers were particularly intriguing to me because they reinforced so strongly that higher education expands White students’ consciousness of their own race and the privilege that coincides with being White. While hearing stories of discrimination her grandfather faced as an immigrant and attending a single sex high school may have laid the foundation, Kimberly’s courses and interactions at Midwestern University helped her “see” how oppression works and the many ways race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other identities interweave to restrict access for persons who are marginalized. She spoke eloquently and honestly about what she knew and what she still had to learn. While it is difficult to say I learned more from one participant than another due to the unique and powerful experiences each shared with me, I was surprised at how informed, open, and passionate Kimberly was about social justice, despite the trappings of an all-White upbringing and comfortable middle class background. Her scores on the ORAS-S were among the highest for the Integrative and Reactive types, which are consistent with her responses during the interviews.

Macy

My interviews with Macy were filled with lots of emotion: enthusiasm, embarrassment, joy, frustration, and sadness. Macy identified as a non-traditional student who was attending Midwestern University part-time and working full time. She returned to school after working for over 25 years in customer service and was 43 years old at the time of our interview. Macy lived

in a working class suburb about 30 minutes from Detroit and grew up in a similar city nearby. Macy attended predominantly White private schools selected by her parents because she said, “we were better than the neighbors”. Many times during the interview, Macy talked about growing up in a “very bigoted household” and feeling very out of place in that environment. She said, “I can remember even before kindergarten sitting on my front porch because we lived four houses from the corner and staring at the corner waiting for my *real* parents to show up because I knew that I didn’t belong (laugh)”. After living with what she described as a “racist dad,” Macy married a man she described as, “extremely...racist, bigoted.” At the time of our interview, she was struggling between several worlds. At Midwestern University, Macy was studying criminal justice, sociology, and women and gender studies. She described how much she loved learning and how courses and co-curricular experiences opened her eyes to the oppression in the world. Macy talked about experiencing joy and success like she had never known through being involved with student organizations and attending conferences with her peers. She was eager to apply for a job on campus. She hoped to dedicate the rest of her life to healing the ills in society. And then, she had a very different world at home where she struggled financially, had a husband who often used racial slurs and was threatened by her pursuit of a college education, and teenage children who did not appreciate how difficult it was for her to balance her many responsibilities.

Within the student population of this study, Macy scored at the high end of the racial acceptance scale with 27 points in the Dominative/Integrative type, suggesting she was firmly within the Integrative type. Her interview answers reflected the Integrative type for the most part. On the Reactive and Conflictive scales, Macy’s scores were in the middle of the pool of participants, and she selected *Neither Agree nor Disagree* for several responses. When

considering the two very different worlds Macy was straddling at Midwestern University and at home, these scores were not surprising and were explained through her interviews.

Marianne

Marianne was a 27-year-old senior when I interviewed her for this study. She was pursuing a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in leadership and communications in organizations, and planned to start graduate school immediately after graduating. Marianne said she liked people and politics and was an avid volunteer. In addition to her college courses, Marianne was working at a non-profit she said focused on "inequality, injustice, and dignity" and "the racial structure of society." She also worked as a bartender. Marianne said she would like to start her own non-profit organization someday and work in politics. Issues she was interested in when we met included health care reform and prescription drug abuse.

When asked about the demographics of the neighborhoods in which she lived and the schools she had attended before college, Marianne said,

OK, well, um, I lived in a predominantly upper class White area. Um, there was, um, it's like middle to upper class, I guess. However, we weren't really like upper class at all.

Um, but, it was predominantly White, there was maybe a few people of, uh, Color.

Immediately after the response above, Marianne added her best friend was half Asian and half Thai, and although her neighborhoods and schools were mostly White, she had "other influences like other cultures" informing her life as well. This pattern of response was typical throughout both of Marianne's interviews. She seemed very aware that her answers, on the surface, suggested she was part of the White, upper class she wanted to "fight" so hard against, and she consistently made comments to attempt to distance herself from that group. Marianne talked about "Corporate America, the 1%, trying to hold down the 99%" and characterized her ideas as

“extremely progressive and a little like, conspiracyish”.

The interviews with Marianne were among the shortest in this study. Despite the open ended questions asked, Marianne’s responses were often one word or short phrases that caused me to ask follow-up questions in an attempt to understand better how she made meaning of her race. At times, I questioned the authenticity of her responses and I wondered if she was trying to give me the “correct” or desired answer—even though I explained at the outset of our time together all answers were valid and considered data. Marianne’s scores on the ORAS-R for the Dominative/Integrative type were in the middle to high range of the study population, which suggested she was accepting and comfortable with persons of all races and she was aware of and opposed to racism. Her Conflictive score was among the lowest, and her interview responses coincided with her score as she was supportive of working to remedy inequality and structural racism. While I saw evidence of this support at a conceptual level in her interview responses, Marianne struggled to provide concrete examples or details when asked follow-up questions. Marianne scored high on the questions related to the Reactive type within the ORAS-R, which could have implied an “intellectual acceptance of racial/ethnic minorities” but perhaps not personal experience or interactions (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 140). While Marianne talked about working to ameliorate inequality and racism in society, my sense was she saw the problem as a big-picture academic exercise that did not touch her personally. That she felt I had not grasped the intricacies or importance of her current non-profit work, which I gathered from her facial expressions and sighs, is also possible. In the end, Marianne’s interview was brief and at times, I questioned the genuineness of her responses.

Monroe

Monroe was a part-time student when she participated in this study. At the outset of the

first interview when I asked Monroe about her standing at the university and gave the examples of first-year or sophomore student, she said, “I am actually a non-traditional student.” At 56 years of age, Monroe identified strongly as an adult learner and non-traditional student and talked about how she struggled at Midwestern University due to this identity. When we met, she was studying criminal justice and returning to college after being away for over three decades. Monroe said she earned a GED after leaving high school to have her first child. Then she tried to go to community college but said, “I didn’t finish the nursing program because I had a baby.” She said she raised her son as a single mother, working two jobs, and living in Detroit. She eventually raised three children by herself and recently retired from working in homeland security at the airport. Monroe said she also struggled with a medical disability, which forced her to retire. She was proud to be enrolled at Midwestern University and said she never thought being a student at such a prestigious school was possible for her.

Monroe’s childhood background was quite different than the rest of the participants in this study because she was not raised in a predominantly White environment. When asked about the demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods and schools of her youth, Monroe said, “I actually was from the, um ... projects when I was younger.” Monroe described the projects as predominantly Black, and said it was clear her family was not wanted in the neighborhood. She remembered coming home from school to find graffiti on the front of her door saying, “Whitey, go home!” She and her brothers often ran through the projects to get to and from school. Monroe noted her brothers had a much harder time than she did because they did not make friends and often were involved in physical fights. Of this time in her life, Monroe said, “Um, it didn’t, it didn’t make me, dislike anyone though.” Instead, Monroe talked about trying to befriend African American girls at the local skating rink and at school. Monroe described her

high school as extremely divided by race, which caused her sometimes to feign illness so she would not have to go to school and “pick” sides. Of her high school she said, “They had the race, the race problems. Whites were on one side, Blacks were on the other, and I was kind of in the middle. Cuz, I, I had friends of all, I like, I like everybody.”

Monroe’s descriptions of her life in general revolved around struggles and conflicts. In addition to the descriptions of her childhood and adolescent years, Monroe talked about tension related to race in the day-to-day activities of her career, when working with service offices on campus at Midwestern University, in the classroom, and in her children’s lives and interactions at their colleges and universities. While Monroe said several times she was not “racial,” the stories she chose to share were in opposition to that statement. At one point in the first interview, she told me about advice she gave her son, “Don’t judge anybody face value, cuz you don’t know what they’ve heard, you don’t know what they’ve seen, you don’t know how they’ve lived.” However, she talked in detail about many clashes she had with African American men and women at various times in her life, many of which were recent.

Monroe’s scores on the ORAS-R for the Dominative/Integrative scale were in the middle of my sample, which provided another lens from which to view the types of White racial consciousness Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) described. Had I just considered the Dominative/Integrative scale score on the survey and listened passively to Monroe’s statements during the interview, I might have assumed she shared many ideas with Rachel and Marianne since their scores were only one point apart. However, when considering Monroe’s Conflictive and Reactive scale scores and a closer reading of her interview responses, it was clear she may have been more similar in racial consciousness to Wayne and John. On the Conflictive scale, Monroe’s score was the second highest score in the student pool—and she did not answer one of

the questions. White persons who score high in the Conflictive type are opposed to programs benefitting persons of Color, who they feel wrongly benefit from government intervention. Also, Monroe's Reactive score was the lowest in the study population. This scale measures the opposite end of the racial justice continuum from Conflictive types. Reactive persons are somewhat conscious of White privilege and identify that society unfairly favors White persons. Monroe's low Reactive score aligned with her interview comments that she felt White people—herself and children specifically—were actually victims in racial politics. Monroe's scores in the Conflictive and Reactive categories were in opposition to her D/I score, which caused me to listen carefully to her responses and ask many follow-up questions to probe for understanding.

Rachel

Rachel was the only student I interviewed in her home. I asked students where they would be most comfortable meeting, and Rachel suggested what she called her “mother's house” which was in the same city as Midwestern University. The home was located in a historic, middle-class neighborhood full of dwellings with large well-kept yards, multiple car garages, and manicured parks. At the age of 30, Rachel was a sophomore with majors in public relations and culture studies. At the time we met, Rachel was contemplating a minor in women and gender studies and talked excitedly about some related classes she took recently. She described herself as a part-time student and full-time employee working in insurance sales. Rachel said she recently took a semester off to deal with what she described as “personal issues” and was excited about returning to Midwestern University in the fall semester.

Due to being raised in a military family, Rachel traveled extensively during her childhood. Rachel was exposed to lots of experience living in what she described as diverse areas. She came to Michigan her junior year of high school, having lived in Maryland. Rachel

described the primary schools she attended as majority White, with “few Black people, some Hispanics, and that’s really the extent of it.” She said for middle school she attended a magnet school that was “mixed as far as race was concerned, but there was a high population of Jewish people.” Regarding the demographics of her high school in Maryland, Rachel replied, “I would say a third of the people were Black and the rest that I am aware of were probably White”. When she came to attend high school in the same city as Midwestern University, she said, “...it was a different culture, which I’ve never experienced before and that was the Arabic culture, which I am still learning about to this day.” Several times during the interviews, Rachel described being curious and wanting to learn more about the Arabic culture. Although she lived in Michigan for over a decade, Rachel spoke with a similar style as Faith who also had not lived in the area her entire life. Both of these participants made note of characteristics and details about the racial and socioeconomic division of the Metropolitan Detroit area with a clarity and observer’s distance that was unique in the study pool.

Rachel’s scores on the ORAS-R were consistent with her interview responses and with her interest and classes related to culture, women, and gender studies. She scored high on the Dominative/Integrative scale relative to the other students in this study and low on the Conflictive scale. Rachel’s answers throughout the interviews supported a growing awareness and sensitivity to racial inequality and justice.

Wayne

The interview with Wayne was the first I completed for this study. At the time we met, Wayne was living in a suburb near Detroit. He was born in South Dakota, moved to Michigan as a child, lived in Detroit when he was younger and then lived in the suburbs for the last few decades. He described the majority of the neighborhoods in which he lived as White and said his

high school was also predominantly White. While he said his mother was a schoolteacher and had “a ridiculous amount of money” he also talked about struggling financially in his current situation. After being in 11 different prisons for over a decade as a result of an undisclosed charge, Wayne had at one time lived in a homeless shelter and was receiving social security disability at the time of our interviews. He said he lived in poverty and only found part-time work as a freelance writer. Wayne also talked about receiving a scholarship and grant money to attend school at Midwestern. He was grateful tuition was reduced due to his age (67 years old) and this resulted in him receiving a refund check. He noted he loved learning and said, “And I get paid for doing it!”

Wayne began his studies at a community college before he transferred to Midwestern University, where he was pursuing a bachelor’s degree in general studies. He said he had been a full-time student in recent years but was attending part-time when we met. Wayne was using an oxygen line and tank during both interviews and struggled to walk to the table at which I was sitting, though only a few feet from the door. A medical condition precluded Wayne from working. He said he enjoyed being a part-time student, loved writing, and was very grateful for the program at Midwestern University that helped him find something he felt good about doing.

Wayne’s scores from the ORAS-R and his responses during both interviews revealed a consistently discriminatory viewpoint regarding race. Of the 10 students within this study population, Wayne had the highest Conflictive score at 25 of a possible 30 points, which was 5 points higher than the next participant. While White persons who are Conflictive may not be overly racist in their actions and words (Vandiver & Leach, 2005), Wayne was aware of his biases and even said very soon after the first interview began, “Yes, I am prejudiced!” The Dominative/Integrative score in the ORAS-R indicates the level of racial acceptance in a White

individual. Wayne's score was the lowest in the sample – by 4 points, suggesting Wayne held negative views about persons of Color, and I found examples of this across both interviews.

In this chapter, I provided background information on the 10 students who participated in this research study. Information provided included age, major/minor areas of study, academic standing, course load, demographic information about childhood neighborhoods and schools, current level of employment, and other relevant characteristics supplied by participants. I included the ORAS-R scores across three scales as additional data for consideration. Also included were my observations and evidence obtained through interview questions. The purpose of supplying these summaries was to provide context for a deep and rich understanding of the persons who contributed to this study.

Table 1: Summary Table of Participants

| Pseudonym | Age | Standing | Major/ Program of Study (All pursuing Bachelor's Degree) | Residence Status (At Time of Interview) | Part-Time or Full-Time Student | Locations Participant has Lived | Employment Status |
|-----------|-----|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Wayne | 67 | Senior | General studies | Off-campus | Part-time | South Dakota, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Rachel | 30 | Sophomore | Public communications/ Culture studies | Off-campus; with parents | Part-time | Maryland, suburb of Detroit | Full-time |
| Macy | 43 | Sophomore | Criminal Justice/sociology | Off-campus | Part-time | Various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| Marianne | 27 | Senior | Political Science | Off-campus | Part-time | Various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| John | 21 | Senior | Communications | Off-campus; with parents | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Not employed |
| Monroe | 56 | Sophomore | Criminal Justice | Off-campus | Part-time | Detroit, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Faith | 37 | Junior | General studies | Off-campus | Part-time | Illinois, various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| Abigail | 18 | First-Year | Biology / Psychology | On-campus apartments | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Not employed |
| April | 23 | Graduate Student | Teaching Social Work Bachelor's | Off-campus with mother | Full-time | Detroit, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Kimberly | 21 | Senior | Industrial Engineering & Chemistry | Off-campus | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Internship |

CHAPTER FIVE: BEING WHITE AND SEEING WHITE

In the previous chapter, I presented background information and a profile for each of the 10 participants in this study. My purpose for including these biographical sketches was to provide a context for the findings and themes included in this chapter. Chapter Five contains participant responses to the research questions posed and related themes that emerged throughout the interviews. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section of this chapter addresses the first research question and related sub-questions posed at the outset of this study: What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race? And, what does it mean to White college students to be White? This first section includes three subsections: how participants described what it means to be White, the advantages and disadvantages they perceived as associated with being White, and the factors they identified as influencing their definition of Whiteness. The second section of this chapter addresses the second research question and related sub-questions of: For those who can “see” their race, what events led to this occurrence? What do these students believe has shaped their ideas about race? What types of educational and other experiences affect how White college students view their own race? Five factors or experiences were identified by participants and are described in the following subsections of this second section: overall experience of being at a “diverse” campus; specific experiences in class or on-campus; hearing persons of Color tell their stories; being in a group or situation that was primarily not White; and focusing on another element of their identity besides race.

What Does it Mean to be White?

In order to select a pool of candidates for this study, participants were asked to identify their race twice: once in a survey questionnaire completed prior to being invited to the study

(see Appendix B), and then again at the outset of the first face-to-face interview. All 10 participants selected “Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic)” from the list of six possible racial or ethnic groups on the emailed questionnaire. During the interviews, participants were asked at least 19 questions about their perceptions and experiences as a White person currently in college. These conversations provided detailed answers to my first research question and sub-question: What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race? And, what does it mean to White college students to be White? In this section, I explain how students described what being White is like, the advantages and disadvantages they said are part of being White, and the factors that have influenced their current definition of what it means to be White. Each of these elements helped students explain their understanding of their race.

How Participants Described Being White

In this study, students were asked directly to describe what being a White person meant to them. Three themes emerged in students’ answers: “I don’t think about it”; being White is ordinary; and I’m not White, I’m _____. Examples of each theme and supporting responses from students are provided and explained in the next section.

“I don’t think about it”. Being White was difficult for students in my study to describe. I noted each of the 10 participants in this study paused, stuttered, sighed, or struggled to answer questions about their race many times throughout the interviews. My transcripts reflected exact renderings of the recordings, such that I used a comma to indicate a pause of one to two seconds, an ellipsis to represent a pause of three to seven seconds, and the phrase “(long pause)” to show a pause of more than 8 seconds. All speech disfluencies (such as “uh” or “um”) and repeated words were also rendered as they occurred and are included in the quotations within this

document because these highlight the difficulties students had describing what it is like to be White.

Five of the 10 participants in my study admitted their race was not something they considered on a daily basis. Three of these students were traditional students under the age of 21 and said something strikingly similar to John's response when asked to describe what being a White person meant to him. He said,

Hmmm. That's difficult ... Yeah ... it's, it's not something I think about too much. It's just I am who I am. It doesn't come up. Me being Wh—like, yeah, in everyday life, it doesn't come up too often. It's just ... you know, it's just a statistic of who I am, for me, sort of. I am ... yeah ... yeah it doesn't really come up too often.

Marianne sighed deeply before answering the same question: "Um ... well (sigh) ... I think it's very vague." She noted this was the first time she had been asked a question like this (e.g., "Describe what being White means to you.") When asked if she identified as a White person, Abigail, a first-year student living in the residence halls on campus said, "Yeah, I, I do but I guess I just don't usually take that into account when I'm thinking about myself, if that makes sense." Overall, the majority of students in my study either directly or indirectly said being White is not something they thought about on a daily basis. This lack of mindfulness about being White is examined more closely in the second theme.

Being White is ordinary. When asked to describe their race, students used a number of synonyms for the word "ordinary." Rachel, a non-traditional student who traveled extensively throughout her childhood, described her experience by saying, "Um, being White means ... I feel ... umm ... hmm ... normal? More common?" After having lived in multiple places throughout the United States before attending college, Rachel described feeling that White meant typical.

Another student, Kimberly, provided a metaphor to explain her race: “White is a blank slate.” In her interviews, she described feeling like she was not noticeable in society, which for her, largely involved middle-class spaces. She felt her race meant she “fit in automatically”. Faith, a non-traditional student who grew up in rural Illinois, described her race as:

Uh, to me, it’s always been ... I don’t know, just, kind of boring. You know (laugh). Because, you know, we are a dime a dozen, I always felt let, uh, fair hair and fair skin, and it’s just so boring. I guess because I grew up around, that’s everyone I grew up around. So it was hard to, find yourself, uh, find uh, distinguishing features. Like especially just kind of physically looking at everybody that I grew up with. So, you know, I’ve always kind of felt like, “Oh, I’m just kind of vanilla” (laugh).

Participants in my study viewed their experience as a White student as so common that at the outset of the interview, they responded they did not think about, focus on, or consider it as an important part of their identity.

I’m not White, I’m _____. Instead of responding favorably about the experience of being White, several participants in this study tried to distance themselves from their race. Although they each selected “White” as their race in the previously emailed questionnaire, these students described themselves during the face-to-face interviews as the children of immigrants, as humans or persons, or as desiring to be of another race. Examples of each of these responses are included in this section.

Three female students talked extensively about their nationality instead of describing themselves as White. Macy responded she did identify as White, but then quickly added,

But I'm also Polish and Hungarian and um ... so what, what that means to me? Um ... (long pause) ... I guess I don't focus as much on the White as the fact that it's more the ... my ancestors have been here longer, I guess?

Later in the interview, Macy described having a difficult childhood being raised by a racist father. She talked about her efforts to heal from this experience by learning about persons of all races and cultures. Although half Macy's age, Kimberly also identified with immigrant roots and provided what she saw as two distinct categories or ways of being White. She said, "I think of kind of the American White—like the quintessential American White person—and then being sort of a child of an immigrant, as two different things." Kimberly considered herself very much a part of the latter, and explained her mother is a first generation American and her grandparents do not speak English or understand what it means to be American. Therefore, she did not see herself or family as the "quintessential American White" persons.

Of all 10 participants, April was the only person to respond "no" to my sixth interview question, "When you think of yourself, do you identify as White?" April said she thought of herself as Polish and had used Ancestry.com to trace her father's ancestors, who lived in the United States since the 1600s. Later in our first interview, she explained her answer further,

I don't like, I don't ... that's why, I don't say I'm White. I, because ... I don't think it's fair to ... (long pause) call me White when I have just as diverse a background as ... somebody who is African American or Black, or whatever they want to refer to themselves as. Like I see it more as they are Italian American, they are Polish American, they are Irish American.

Throughout their interviews, both April and Macy talked about negative emotional experiences related to race, involving family members, spouses, or partners, which might explain their desire

to disassociate themselves with being White. Kimberly provided a much different perspective, instead revealing intense love for and loyalty to her family and speaking of very positive involvements with her Hungarian and German heritage while in the United States. Additionally, two students (John and Abigail) expressed a desire to know more about where they had come from, stating their families did not focus much on their family history and rarely discussed it, much to the students' dismay.

Another variation on the idea of "I'm not White, I'm ____" was the response that students thought of themselves as humans or persons instead of White. Marianne hesitated and struggled when asked if she identified as a White person. Then, she said, "Yeah. Well, I don't really like think of it like, 'Oh! I'm White!' You know, I think of it like, 'Oh! I'm a *person!*' (laugh) You know." She went on to explain she felt all people are the same and she does not treat anyone differently based on race. Rachel's response revealed her recent completion of several women's and gender studies classes, in which she learned new information about race. She said,

I'm really consumed with what I'm learning in school and being more aware, that I tend to or I try to think of myself as not "White" but just as another person and that we all come from different walks of life. Um ... (long pause) I don't really know that there's ever been a time that I really thought that, "Oh ... I'm White."

The third manner in which participants tried to separate themselves from being identified as White was by admitting they desired at one time to be another race. Abigail stated directly a theme evident throughout both of her interviews, "Sometimes I kind of wish I had a little bit of diversity in my, like, my background." For some students, this perceived lack within their own race caused them to even wish they were of another race. Monroe, a non-traditional student who

grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood said, “Being a White person? When I was younger, you know, I wanted to be Black really bad. Really bad.”

Had I merely relied on these participants checking the “Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic)” option on my emailed questionnaire to explain their race, I would have missed the opportunity to learn about the more nuanced way the participants in this study understood their White identity. When asked to describe the experience of being White, students said they did not think about it, being White meant being ordinary, or they made efforts to distance themselves from being associated with White people. To help further explain how participants in this study defined their race, the next section contains responses about the privileges and drawbacks they linked to the White experience.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Being White

To help answer the first research question of what it meant for my participants to be White, a second area I considered was how students responded when asked directly about the advantages and disadvantages of being White. As with the previous section, students’ responses were complex, at times conflicting, and required much probing to understand. In this section, I provide examples of advantages students told me about. Then I address the fact that several participants acknowledged White persons do experience privileges, but these students did not feel they experienced those advantages personally. Then, participants’ responses about the disadvantages of being White are explored.

Advantages of being White. Students were asked to identify advantages and disadvantages they associated with their race. For the advantages, students’ answers can be categorized into two topics: not being judged for their race and viewing White as being powerful and effortless. In the first category of not being judged, three groups of responses are included:

being given the benefit of the doubt, privileges in hiring, and flying under the radar. Student responses for each grouping of answers are provided.

Not being judged for their race. Half of the students in this study noted they experienced or observed that overall, White persons are not condemned by society based solely on their race. Through telling their stories and providing examples, these participants described feeling like their race meant others assumed positive outcomes would result from interactions with them as White persons. Under the heading of not being judged, these advantages were described as Whites being given the benefit of the doubt, having privileges during hiring, and flying under the radar.

April succinctly stated direct evidence of not being judged for her race by saying, “I’m given the benefit of the doubt”. She and other students listed many examples under this theme, including not being suspected or followed in stores, not being stopped in traffic, and/or not being viewed as a threat by law enforcement. Reflecting on a statement she made earlier in the interview that being White was bland, Kimberly also admitted, “I definitely see that idea of kind of blankness ... as almost a blessing in disguise”. When she heard a friend who she identified as Hispanic talk about his experiences with racial profiling, Kimberly said she realized just how much she benefited as a White person.

Students recognized being White usually afforded them better opportunities when seeking a job. Kimberly said she was aware her “stereotypical White name” meant employers would not discriminate against her, whereas she said, “if you have a particularly ethnic name, people are going to assume that you are *not* White.” Kimberly noted she heard in her classes that persons with ethnic names have experienced discrimination during hiring. April also talked about the hiring process and said she sometimes chose not to reveal her race if she was applying

for a job with a non-profit, where being a “minority” might be preferred if that organization serves “minorities” (emphasis hers). She said she exercised the option of disclosing her race and would do this when applying to predominantly White school districts because she felt this might help her get the job. In both cases, students were aware of the advantages of being White when looking for employment.

The idea their race made life easier was noted by several female students who elaborated on the notion that being in the majority was favorable. Marianne explained by saying,

...for instance, being that I’m White, I kind of fly under the radar. There’s really no stereotypes attached to me ... as far as I know, there’s no negative ones that are going to be attached to me as soon as they see me, you know ... it’s neutral. It’s neutral.

Marianne expressed further she never experienced stereotypes associated with being White and felt she was not judged adversely and therefore not affected in any way by her race. Abigail’s response demonstrated more awareness of the privileges associated with her race and expressed some unhappiness with the fact she is “advantaged.” She said of White persons,

I think ... in some ways we’re really advantaged. I, I don’t think we’re judged and there aren’t as many stereotypes placed on us. I don’t think I have to ... fight against stereotypes on a daily basis like many people do. So, in those types of ways I think I definitely am advantaged. Sad to say. But, well, yeah.

Kimberly also mentioned White persons are not stereotyped as much as persons of other races, an advantage she said extended to the classroom. “Teachers don’t *usually* have a preconceived notion of you, based on race, if you’re White” she said. Kimberly noted this provided a sense of freedom from judgment, indicative of this first advantage of being White. All three students used the word “stereotype” when asked how being White affected daily life and their answers

explained being White meant not being labeled or limited by race.

Viewing White as being effortlessly powerful. The second way students described the advantage of being White was they knew it was powerful and came to Whites without effort. Interviewees identified White persons as being the “biggest group” (John) and “role models” (Kimberly) in American culture. When asked about any advantages she had noticed of being White, Marianne said “Whites have more power over other people, they’re more apt to get what they want and be successful.” Kimberly extended this idea of the influence of famous Whites and noted popular culture is flush with examples. She said,

So it’s almost something I don’t really have to think about because, you know, there’s so many celebrities that look like me. There’s so many successful people who, who, I can look to as role models that look like me and kind of ... have that similar racial experience to me.

Even though earlier in her interview she identified more with her immigrant roots than the “quintessential American White person,” Kimberly acknowledged ruefully the overabundance of White exemplars in daily life and that she, herself, benefitted as a result.

Participants knew being White was easier, simpler, and a better place in the United States social order. Students said being White automatically provided benefits. John explained, “...if there are advantages, you know, to being White, I don’t really consider them too much. It’s just something that happens.” He later described these advantages as “latent benefits”. Kimberly agreed “it’s not something I *have* to think about a lot and it was only really in college that I noticed because before everybody was White. So ... it was ... it wasn’t ... a thing”. In summary, half of the students in my study population made statements indicating they viewed being White as providing the advantages of not being judged for their race and the idea that

Whites have a preferred status in society that comes without effort.

While some students described the advantages they saw as part of being White, several participants made certain I understood they had not personally felt or received those benefits. John, who acknowledged there are positive effects of being in the largest racial group, said later in his interview he never received “direct” advantages of being White. He said, “Yeah, nothing direct, like I didn’t win the lottery because I’m White or something like that but, um, it *probably* makes life easier”. John could not think of or provide any specific examples of where he consciously experienced the inherent advantages of his race during either of the interviews. Marianne also said being White did not affect her college experience directly. She said, “...I’ve always been like, the White majority. And so I don’t see any different, nor do I feel like I’m treated any differently.” Earlier in her interview, Marianne said she could not name any advantages being White provided her. Rachel’s answer was confusing as she seemed to go back and forth between White and Black, family members and herself, and whether or not she is advantaged for her race. She said,

I can’t say that I have an advantage because I’m White, but I *do* think that because I’m not—I wasn’t born Black in an inner city school, I have the advantage of parents who might have actually had advantages or grandparents who had advantages because they were White ... statistics show that White people have an *advantage* when it comes to how they pay, jobs, school, etc., that you know, I do somehow have this advantage, which, I just never recognized before. I don’t know that I necessarily experience it *personally*, but on a grander scale, I do tend to agree with it.

In essence, Rachel admits to being born White and having the related advantages by default but seems to feel it was her parents and grandparents who received the direct benefits—not her.

Taken out of context, Rachel's answer might be misconstrued as blatantly oblivious to the many ways she has profited from her race. However, that she was processing information she learned in her women and gender studies courses recently is possible. At various times during her interviews, Rachel provided conflicting verbal statements. Later in this chapter, I examine further how students' said being at a diverse campus and being in multiracial classes caused them to reconsider their views of race and being White.

Each of the students in this subsection had the benefits of being from middle-class neighborhoods, schools, and backgrounds—which were predominantly White. One was attending college on a full scholarship, and all had described at some point in their interviews explicit benefits I could identify as being derived directly from being White. However, these participants could not name any absolute benefits they thought came to them as a result of their race.

Disadvantages of being White. While participants may have struggled to name specific or day-to-day benefits they experienced as a result of being White, they talked in detail and at length about times when they experienced distinct disadvantages. Some students told stories about being overlooked for resources (such as money and scholarships) because they were White. Others said they were not sure if they were discriminated against, but “heard” that Whites were typically ignored or at a disadvantage in certain situations and this caused participants significant concern before college. Students also identified a variety of stereotypes that cast being White in a negative light. Each of these collections of responses are explored next.

Whites are overlooked for resources. Nine of the 10 participants in this study talked freely and without reserve about feeling that sometimes, White people are at a disadvantage due

to their race – especially when the situation involves specific monetary resources. The participants easily thought about and provided examples of times when they felt they have been overlooked because they were White. In particular, students talked about money and scholarships as areas where they directly experienced the shortcomings of being White. The topic of college admissions was mentioned as well to be an area of disadvantage for White people. These topics are explored in the next section.

Money. Three non-traditional students (Macy, Monroe, and Wayne) talked about having economic hardships in their lives and feeling like race precluded them from being given assistance or resulted in inequity for White people. In each of their responses, students also talked about persons of Color when questions were asked about the White experience. Macy described several times when she felt being White worked against her. When asked if she could recall a time when she was very aware of being White, she first mentioned a class discussion briefly, and then told the story of being rejected for financial assistance at the department of human services because her family income was over the threshold for consideration by less than one dollar. She said,

So we trudge out to our 20-year old car held together with duct tape and wire and all these people are coming out fanning Bridge Cards, dripping in gold, hair made up, getting in Cadillacs and Lexuses and you know, I'm just like, what? How?

Her frustration was palpable during this portion of the interview. Then, she talked about her experiences working as a cashier at a nursery. As her agitation rose, she repeatedly used the word “um” and the phrase “you know” in her answers. Macy said,

We'd get a lot of, um, a lot of, um, families that come in, um, especially, Hispanic families, you know that they don't even speak the language and before we accept the

Bridge Card, you know, they, they don't speak English you know, they would just stand there, you know, and we can't take it. The six year old is translating until finally, you know, they understand that, you know, and whip out a wad of 50s and 100s, you know, you know. We've worked here and lived her 25 years and, and nothing. You know, it's just, the system is just wrong. So in that case, yes, yeah I felt very White then.

Macy was emotional while she relayed these experiences. Her voice rose in pitch, she used her hands to gesture, and shook her head from side to side. Later, she returned to this story and clarified by saying, "...it's not, like I walk into someplace, you know, thinking I should be up front. It's nothing like that. It's just ...". She left the thought unfinished.

Several times across both interviews, Monroe talked about feelings of resentment when she had to interact with persons of Color in situations involving money. She talked about going to the financial aid office at her institution to ask questions about her assistance package and being made to wait a long time because she was White. She used this story to provide an example of what she saw as a disadvantage of being White. She said,

So, you have three Black women, two White women. The three Black women will make you stand there, will make you stand there. Every single time. In fact I even documented it 'cuz I thought, "This is ridiculous!" ... Behind the counter when you are um, trying to go into Financial Aid. They are not on the phone and they are not typing, they're chewing gum, or ... and what, I, that's only, that only what I've seen. I haven't ever had the White people that, she waited on me one time, and she was fast, boom, I was out of there. So, I don't know if that's a power, a power thing, maybe?

Several times during her interviews, Monroe described feeling vulnerable due to her socioeconomic status, stating she grew up in the projects, raised a child as a single mother at the

age of 17, and relied on charitable assistance from time to time. Monroe talked about being frustrated when she had to interact with persons of Color who she perceived as in a position of “power” such as behind a counter administering financial aid. Additionally, she described similar encounters her children had at other colleges and universities.

When asked what being White meant to him, Wayne, a non-traditional student, said it felt burdensome. He reflected on the recent news about taxpayers having to pay for the schooling of illegal immigrants in the United States and said,

(Long pause). Hmm ... yeah ... well ... I realize ... uh, minorities have a tough road to hoe sometimes. But ... that doesn't mean that I should uh ... have to suffer because of it. You know ... we ... I think by now we've made enough concessions to people, that uh, like uh ... But, uh ... yeah, I just like ... it means um ... I'm supposed to bear the brunt of everybody's uh, sob stories, well ... too damn bad! Things weren't that great for me either! (laugh)

Although Wayne described having a comfortable upbringing in a suburb of Detroit, his adult years brought many hardships. After being in prison for 11 years, Wayne found himself without a place to live and forced to rely on assistance. At the time of our interview, Wayne talked about continued struggles with having enough money to live on and health challenges. For these students who endured what they described as significant financial challenges during their lives, socioeconomic status seemed to play a role in the way they explained their experiences of race—and each brought up persons of other races when asked about the disadvantages of being White. Macy, Monroe, and Wayne expressed feeling they suffered enough and seemed to think being White contributed to their not receiving financial compensation at the same level persons of Color had. This response will be considered further in Chapter Seven particularly related to

adult learners.

Scholarships. When asked about the disadvantages of being White, several participants chose to talk about scholarships. John told me he received a scholarship to Midwestern University that was “pretty much a full ride”. Then, he talked about his dismay that he did not get offered as much of a scholarship at a more prestigious campus to which he had also been accepted. He said,

I feel like possibly if I was a different race, I may, I may have gotten more because, you know, diversity ... I think with affirmative action, like, with someone, if I had been, you know, a diff-if I hadn't been a White male with my grades and my test scores, I think I would have gotten more financial compensation, just straight up.

John explained that in the end, he decided to go to Midwestern because he was not certain of his major and wanted to save money. He told me with pride he earned a high grade point average and ACT score in high school, which resulted in him being given a full scholarship and not having to work during any of the four years he had already spent pursuing his degree. These advantages were not visible to John during our interviews and his responses indicated he felt like a victim of an unfair system in which White meant less deserving.

Two students talked about feeling the majority of college scholarships available were specifically earmarked for African American students. When asked about experiences in college that made her think about her race, April said without hesitation, “Scholarships. Um, I didn't *qualify* ... I would say 90% of those scholarships said, ‘Priority given to African Americans’ or ‘Priority given to non-Whites’.” Another non-traditional student, Faith, talked about her scholarship search when returning to school later in life. Faith said,

I was noticing, that clicking through a lot of them, I'm like, “Oh, that doesn't apply to

me. That's for um, African American journalism" (laugh) or, you know this and that. So I remember thinking, "Man! I'm just an old, single, White female" you know (laugh).

Both students talked about having financial needs due to either being from a single parent home (April) or due to the economy (Faith). I asked each student why they thought so many scholarships were allocated to African American students. Their responses were quite similar and acknowledged feelings of sympathy, while still feeling they themselves were worthy of some kind of financial reward. April's quote speaks to this tension, "I don't think they [African Americans receiving scholarships] are undeserving, um ... but I think I'm deserving as well". Scholarships were a big topic of conversation in my pilot study at Madonna University. All of the six traditional age students I interviewed talked about scholarships and specifically that they felt they had been unjustly overlooked and unrewarded for their hard work in high school. All also said they had seen many scholarships designated for and given to African American students and had conflicting feelings about the rightness of this.

Admissions processes. An air of mystery was present in students' responses related to how colleges and universities make decisions about who to include in their student bodies. There was also a sense White students were disregarded unfairly in this process. Rachel wanted to know how affirmative action "works". She told a story about a Black colleague at her job who proudly talked about his daughter's college acceptance and receipt of a full scholarship.

... and my first thought was, "I wonder if she had played sports. I wonder if she had any extracurricular activities. I wonder if she had all these other things to back up her probably 4 point plus GPA" because, if she didn't have all those things, I think she probably got in because she's Black. I hate (laugh) to say that but that's what I thought (laugh). I, because I remember listening to people saying that you can have a 4.0 all you

want but if you don't have all these other things to back it, then you're probably not gonna get in.

In her answer, Rachel mentioned reverse discrimination and affirmative action and described her observations that people use "ethnicity or color" to gain advantages in society.

Both Rachel and Abigail referred to "hearing" negative things about affirmative action while in high school. Abigail's response was of particular interest because it highlights several key fears White students in my pilot and research study discussed. I included a large portion of her response below because it captures the overall feelings expressed by most of the 16 students across my pilot and dissertation research studies. When asked about disadvantages of being White, Abigail talked about the application process for college. During this part of the interview, her tone and demeanor became very serious, as she talked about her anxiety while applying for college. She said,

I was not, discouraged completely. But I felt like I didn't have as good of a chance because I, I wasn't from this really interesting background. And I didn't have any social injustices placed upon me. So, I felt like maybe I was at a disadvantage for being advantaged, almost? And, um, it didn't affect my college application process, I don't believe. I still applied to um, [a large, prestigious state university], you know, and everywhere I wanted to and to schools that I was considering. So, it didn't affect that, but ... I, I just remember in high school, like, people would talk about, um, affirmative action. We discussed that a lot. Just different things like that, and that made me think that I wasn't ... um ... I didn't have as much of a chance of getting into schools that I was, you know, considering ... That colleges were trying to diversify their campuses, basically. Which I completely understand and that, from what I understood that, like,

White males had the least chance because ... not that they were the least desirable, but for the most part, they, they weren't, um, they didn't have like, the same backgrounds that most, the colleges were looking for. They want people from all these different backgrounds. I think they had a lot of, like, White applicants. And so you had to stand out more to be one of the ones that they wanted.

When I asked Abigail to clarify her answer, she articulated her feelings of anxiety had not come from the college application itself or from the actual admissions process. Instead, she was worried based on the conversations she had been part of and overheard while in high school about affirmative action wrongly penalizing Whites. She acknowledged that in her case, being White did not have an effect because she was admitted to all institutions to which she applied. Abigail's answer is important because it points to gaps in understanding for participants in both my pilot and dissertation studies – students do not have data and information about how resources are distributed in United States society. Instead, students were consumed with fears based on what they “heard” which was being White is a disadvantage in issues related to scholarships and college admissions. So far in this section, I provided information about how White students defined their race in terms of feeling overlooked for a number of resources related to higher education. In the next section, participants' ideas about undesirable labels associated with Whites are examined to better understand how White college students interpreted their race during my study.

Negative White stereotypes. In their attempt to explain what it meant to be a White college student, some participants in my study talked about negative stereotypes that exist for White people. They provided statements about the prejudice and intolerance associated with Whites and labels related to gender and socioeconomic status. Examples of these are provided in

this section.

Prejudice and intolerance. When asked about White stereotypes, several participants referenced historical events. April talked about being associated with a race that meant she was judged for “horrible things that have happened in history” such as slavery and internment camps. April said this meant “non-Whites automatically assume that I (long pause) would not be accepting of them”. She talked about how the media has amplified this effect, and the “loudest voices” in American media are White, so “...everybody that is not White thinks that those are the opinions of ... the entire race”. Similarly, Abigail said that White people have “notoriously been prejudiced” in history. Abigail stated White persons are known to be “more closed-minded” which supported April’s assertions. Students in this study talked about racist White persons, the tendency for the media to focus on and support White interests, and the fact that the majority of Corporate America consists of the “wealthy Whites” (Marianne). These examples were provided by students as unflattering but real stereotypes associated with being White. Some participants talked about seeing these stereotypes on a daily basis.

Gender and socioeconomic status. Negative White stereotypes related to gender and socioeconomic status were noted by several students in this study. Regarding gender, both females and males were mentioned. Two participants talked about what April called the “rich White girl suburb stigma label” and said included expectations that she would be “snobby” as a White woman. April also talked about negative expectations for what White girls “would do” as mentioned in sexually explicit song lyrics. Kimberly said “people kind of perceived you as vapid, kind of lazy, you know, show up 15 minutes later to everything with your Starbucks kind of thing”. Related to White men, Rachel talked about a political cartoon she had seen online that depicted a White man who “looked like Bill Gates” and had the word “rich” written below him

to signify his worth. Kimberly told stories about her father and White men at her workplace who were “your quintessential balding engineer with glasses”. She referred to men of this type collectively as “Greg” and said,

...a bunch of people I work with come from this generation that says, you know, as ... a White man, you ... are, are very encouraged to share your ideas, you’re very encouraged to be confident in your ideas and, sometimes, I mean, there, there’s almost like there’s not that double-checking mechanism because, well, you know, why wouldn’t you be right almost? ... so for example, like Greg came from a world where ... America was the leaders and the best ... (long pause) um ... (laugh) ... and, you know ... we were right! And ... we were, on top of the dog pile at the time ...

In both examples, students talked about the idea that White men were viewed as powerful, that they exercised their power, and they were expected to have advantages in American society.

Additionally, students mentioned a very different view of White people when they described the “White trash” stereotype, using descriptors such as “a bunch of kids on welfare” (Rachel) and a “rusted pickup truck” and the “trailer park” (Kimberly). Far from complimentary, these White stereotypes were relayed by students with eye rolls, sighs, and nervous laughter and an undertone of embarrassment.

So far in Chapter Five, I examined students’ definitions of being White. Through words and phrases and observations and stories about the advantages and disadvantages of life as a White person, participants described their understanding of their own race. Next, family, neighborhoods, and schools are discussed as factors that affected students’ definitions of being White.

Factors that Influenced Participants' Definition of Whiteness

In this subsection, I explore the factors that students said shaped their lives as White persons before they attended college. For traditional age students who lived at home with parents and family members at the time of these interviews, some of these factors were mentioned as continued influences. Factors that students said formed their ideas about race were family and neighborhoods and schools, which are described in the next section.

Family. Students in my study named their families as an influential factor in developing ideas about their race. All 10 participants mentioned at least one of their family members during the interviews for this study. Students' responses about family influence on perceptions of race can be categorized into two main ideas: being raised in an environment of non-judgmental interest in race and equality, and being taught about important racial differences. Within the second grouping, racist family members and "first time" stories of meeting persons who were not White are examined. Each of these ideas is discussed in this section.

Non-judgmental interest in race and equality. Four female students in my study described being raised by White family members who taught them to be open and curious about persons of other races and cultures. Overall, these participants expressed positive memories and strong feelings of equality and non-discrimination. Rachel's childhood consisted of moving frequently with her family due to having a parent in the military. Although she did not remember being taught outright by her parents about race, she said, "...it didn't matter if you were a different color or different race or different anything ... everyone was the same: equal." Abigail also said her mother had lived "all over the world" and this contributed to her family's sense of openness. When asked about any family discussions she remembered having about being White, Abigail said,

I guess, we never discussed exactly what our own race was, but my parents were always like trying to make sure I wasn't judgmental like I said. And they're very non-discrimina, discriminatory people. And they definitely tried to instill that in all of us They, like we talked about before, they wouldn't think about a person's race, you know. If they, if someone needed help on the side of the road, my dad would, you know, it wouldn't matter what race they were: Black, White, whatever ... He would help them. He would help 'em out.

Both Rachel and Abigail noted that although they did not recall explicit conversations about race in their families, the overall lesson learned was one of acceptance. Faith noted that despite not being exposed to much diversity in her small, rural hometown, "equality has always been important to me, whether gender or racial or religious." She talked about having older siblings who exposed her directly to new things, such as Buddhism. April also mentioned learning about other cultures and religions from a family member. She said of her father,

...when I was a child he used to bring me to festivals downtown, or ... I always tell everybody we had a Buddha in our backyard. I didn't know what it was, but, and we used to have Hindu books in our bathroom and stuff like that. My dad is a very curious individual um, and he ... introduced me to things um, to museums and people and festivals and music that I wouldn't have ... that are so outside of my ... demographic...

During these portions of the interviews, each participant displayed enthusiasm and positive emotions when talking, smiling often during their answers. Comparing these reactions to those of the next section in which participants described being taught there were important differences between Whites and other races was interesting due to the contrast in responses. Facial expressions, body language, and overall demeanor were much more closed, pained, and negative

in situations where students talked about having been taught about differences in race.

Family members teaching about differences. Childhood experiences were discussed by each of the participants in my study, typically in response to my inquiry about their previous family discussions about being White. Some students described memories of overhearing or being taught directly there was a difference between being White and not being White. These teachings came in the form of instructions, directives, use of racial slurs, jokes, complaints, selective silence, and/or stories. Examples of each are included in this section.

Faith and April both recounted stories about growing up with bi-racial cousins. April said as a child, she remembered hearing of her cousin, “his childhood was difficult because he was raised in a White family and he’s bi-racial”. Both Macy and April talked about receiving instructions from family members about interacting with persons of other races. “In Kindergarten, there was one African American girl and I was told [by my father], ‘Do *not* bring her home!’” Macy recounted. She talked about knowing this was wrong even as a small child and said she often waited for her “*real* parents to show up because I knew I didn’t belong”. As a result of her decision to be involved in an interracial relationship in high school, April remembered her mother talking to her about the difficulties she would encounter. April said she felt her mother was trying to equip her to live in a racially biased society by giving her careful instructions.

Half of the participants in my study recounted racial slurs and jokes about African Americans they had heard as children from grandmothers, uncles, fathers, and brothers. I noted participants laughed tensely, looked down or away from me, and sighed during these portions of the interviews. Additionally, John said that as a child, he remembered hearing his father complain about persons of Color after coming home from his shift at an automobile factory. He

said, "...he's had some experiences that have soured him on some, other, people based on their race. He likes to complain sometimes." Since John lived at home during college, he was still being exposed to this complaining by his father at the time of our interview.

Four participants in this study told stories of their "first time" hearing about, seeing, or meeting African Americans. Observing that each student, with ages ranging from 21 to 67, adopted childlike mannerisms when telling these stories from their youth, either by using a high-pitched voice or making themselves physically smaller in their chairs, was surprising. These students were reliving the memory as they told it to me. Three of the four stories involved close adult family members joking or using racial slurs to refer to African Americans. Macy talked about her first experience meeting an African American man who was one of her father's friends. She said,

He worked for him and they, they, they were work buddies, I guess you could say. But they both had an interest in cars and so he would come over every once in a while. So, that, um, he, I don't want to say he *scared* me, but he would joke with me and so, 'cuz he would ask me what color I thought his blood was. And he would say, "It's blue!" But he said, "But everybody's was blue!" So, you cut yourself and ... I did not have a lot of exposure besides the names that, you know ... were associated because of my racist dad (laugh).

In the "first time" stories of Wayne, Faith, and Macy, each talked about feeling confused about how Whites and Blacks were similar and different as the result of these exchanges and the messages from adults involved. Macy seemed puzzled decades later about why her father made an exception to befriend one African American person and then talked so negatively about all others. John also told a story about an incident that stuck out in his mind from childhood as very

instructive on the issue of what it meant to be White. He talked about his father taking him to a golf tournament where something memorable occurred between himself and an African American man. He said,

But uh, this uh, security guard, he like, he was getting a little, uh, like making sure people didn't ... (cleared throat) you know get too close. Yeah, but uh ... he stood like in my way kind of uh, and he was Black. And the kid next to me was Black so he moved out of that kid's way and into my way. And it didn't really, I don't remember if it bothered me. I was like seven or eight, but my dad, it bothered him. Yeah, and that was, that was the first time I really remember something like that.

John talked about how his father did not say anything during the incident, but complained at length about it afterward and continually brought it up over the last 13 years.

I observed a mixture of awkwardness and embarrassment as these four adults told their "first time" stories. Eye-rolling, puzzled facial expressions, sighing, nervous laughter, and pausing were some of the outward expressions I noted during these parts of the interview. An underlying sense of fear was also part of the exchanges as described by the now adult participants. As children, they saw family members using new and unfamiliar words, ideas, or behaviors when referring to or interacting with persons who were Black and learned there was an important difference between White persons and persons who were not White.

Neighborhoods and schools before college. When not with their family members, children typically spend most of their time in their neighborhood or at school. Both of these places were factors that influenced how my study participants defined what it meant to be White. In this section, I examine how both where they lived and where they learned had an influence on students' ideas about race.

Responses about neighborhoods and schools in this study were similar in that the phrase “predominantly White” and variants thereof were used repeatedly. I asked students to tell me about the demographic composition of students in their grade school, high school, and neighborhood before coming to college. Nine of the 10 participants attended schools that were “all White” (Wayne) or “very White” (Faith). A related comment made by participants was that their schools had either one or a few Black students or a few persons of Color. This “broadening” (Kimberly) of the student population to include persons who were not White occurred during the high school years. Several students recalled hearing racist comments made during middle and high school (Marianne and Abigail) by White students about students of Color. Additionally, four interviewees said they attended private or charter schools. Of this, Macy noted, “I grew up in a very um, a very bigoted household. That’s why I was sent to private schools because we were better than the neighbors”.

Since the majority of my study participants experienced predominantly White families and neighborhoods prior to attending college, schools were mentioned as the only opportunity to meet and interact with persons of other races. Only four of the 10 participants described having “a friend” who was of another race prior to attending college. Three students explained these friendships were close and one participant’s response lacked depth and details, suggesting more of an acquaintance relationship. April was the only participant in my study who described having a diverse group of friends in middle and high school, including persons who were bi-racial, Mexican, Puerto Rican, African American, and Jordanian. She discussed how several Catholic schools closed resulting in a diverse group of students attending her private schools in a suburb near Detroit. Later in the interview, April noted she left a predominantly White university after her first-year of college because,

...coming from this area, um, I feel a huge pull to different cultures. And when I went to [a large, public, predominantly White liberal arts institution] I didn't feel like ... there was anything to ... discover because everybody looks like me. Um and I felt ... the school itself did a good job with you know, um, showcasing other cultures. But the student body, it just wasn't there.

In this first section of Chapter Five, I presented three main themes that affected how students in my study described what it means to be White. First, when asked directly to describe what being White meant to them, students responded in one of three ways. They said they did not think about being White often, or that being White is ordinary, or they tried to disconnect themselves from what they perceived as negative connotations of Whiteness. Then, participants spoke about the advantages and disadvantages they associated with being White, mentioning stereotypes as well. Last, family members, neighborhoods, and schools were presented as factors that influenced students' perceptions of their race before they came to college. In the section two of this chapter, I will move to the discussion of my second research question about the experiences and events students said shaped their perception of race while in college.

Experiences That Helped White College Students “See” Their Own Race

In the previous chapter, I wrote about how my study participants described their understanding of what it means to be White. Components students said influenced their definition of their race included life events or observations, advantages or disadvantages they heard about or experienced, stereotypes, family members, neighborhoods, and schools. In this section, I consider what occurred since these students began college that enabled them to “see” their own race (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003) and how those related events shaped the way they made meaning of their race. The following five factors were identified by participants as

opportunities that further refined their ideas about what it meant to be White in college. Each is described in sub-sections of this chapter: the overall experience at a “diverse” campus, in-class and on-campus experiences, hearing the stories of persons of Color, being in a group or situation that was primarily not White, and encounters with another element of their identity besides race.

Overall Experience at a “Diverse” Campus

This subsection includes two themes: my study participants perceived attending college with persons of Color as meaningful and these interactions triggered White students to reflect on their own race. Being at a “diverse” campus was noted as an important daily part of these students’ experiences at Midwestern University. Considering that all of the students in my study came from homogenous neighborhoods and schooling environments (with nine students from predominantly White areas and one student from a predominantly Black area), the overall college experience at what students described as a “diverse” campus was significant. I placed quotes around the word “diverse” because students described Midwestern University in this way. The term is relative to their experience as Midwestern University’s website indicated that three-fourths of students on campus at the time of our interviews were White.

Students talked about seeing, overhearing, interacting with, and thinking about persons of other races while at Midwestern University, and that these were new encounters. John, a fourth-year senior living off campus who talked about growing up and living with racist family members said the following,

... it can work, intermingling of sorts. Yeah, you don’t have to be segregated for something like school because, you know, there’s a huge diversity here and things work out, things work out as far as I know. And, like there’s no excess crime or something

here and yeah, I think everyone gets along. And, you get a lot to meet people cuz that's what college is about, like widening your horizons and this is a good example of that.

The quote above suggests John is still working through the conflict between what he learned about race as a child being raised in an intolerant home and his new experiences attending a diverse university. Throughout both interviews, John provided responses showing he was glad to be at Midwestern University because it was more varied racially and culturally than his neighborhood and he found this environment interesting. And at the same time, he was still working through expectations and fears he had heard in his home (such as seen in the quote above where he mentioned "segregated" schooling and expected there to be "excess crime" at Midwestern because it was not all-White).

Abigail, an 18 year-old first-year student living on campus, demonstrated a keener awareness of how her ideas about being White were in transition while at Midwestern University. She made note of how the university and the surrounding city provided "a lot of different cultural experiences" for her that were very new experiences. She said,

It, it definitely took some adjusting. I just wasn't, I wasn't used to so many different cultures. It was actually really awesome at the same time, to see so many different kinds of people! But it, it was different. I was, I think we had maybe, a handful, maybe five people in my graduating class that weren't White. So it was, it was much different. And, I like it because it's definitely not so bland!

John and Abigail's lives before and during college were quite different. While John grew up and still lived with at least one family member he described as racist, Abigail talked of being raised in a house focused on being non-judgmental. Abigail also moved from her predominantly White neighborhood and home to live on a campus and in a city that provided her the opportunity to see

and interact with “many different kinds of people”. Both students’ quotes show that being on a diverse campus caused them to consider aspects of their own race.

Several students in my study made particular note of Arab American and Middle Eastern students at Midwestern University, expressing curiosity and genuine interest in learning more about these student populations. Abigail said, “I had a lot of questions about certain kinds of people because I just, I hadn’t experienced everything. Especially like the Arabic community. That’s something we really didn’t have near my house at all”. Kimberly noted “there’s definitely a bigger Middle Eastern population which isn’t something that existed really at all in my grade school or high school”. Macy recounted with excitement several conversations with an Arab American student in her anthropology class and how she learned about the broad diversity within that community in Southeastern Michigan. Each of these experiences was new and exciting for students who described largely homogenous existences before attending Midwestern University. It was clear from participants’ responses they considered persons they perceived as of Arab American or Middle Eastern descent as not White.

After having spent the bulk of their lives living and learning surrounded by persons they viewed as racially similar to themselves, the students in my study said being in the presence of and interacting with people of different races while at Midwestern University caused them to reflect on their own race. When asked if her idea of being White changed at all during college, Kimberly said it had. She explained it was not until college, when she was outside of totally White environments, that she considered what her own race meant. She said,

..it really made me think more about it because I know in grade school and high school, I didn’t really think about it because everybody else is White. And it was, it was just something like, well everybody else is people, everybody else has two legs, you know. It

is what it is, it wasn't something, that ever ... gave me pause, I guess. But, I, I think since, meeting more, people from different backgrounds, people with different, experiences because of culture, because of race, it's really made me think of ... how has *my* experience been different because I was White?

Kimberly went on to say that in college, she realized her own emphasis on the importance of family was shared by many persons of other races as well. Through interactions and conversations Kimberly gained knowledge of similarities across race. Exposure to new populations was the first step described by my study participants, and some students took that element to the next level by engaging in conversation with persons they perceived as racially different from themselves. This increased sense of awareness and interest to talk with persons outside of her own race was echoed by Faith, who talked with enthusiasm about being on a diverse campus. She said,

And, and so, just being in a classroom where you have all these different perspectives and you have good discussions, um, I, I would say that, like my views of being White on campus are, um, it, you know I talked about being kinda boring and vanilla earlier, well I realized, I'm not that way to someone that's from Yemen, or, you know, then they might want to know about my background or experiences. So you, I think being on campus you get more of a, a collaboration or, or a feel of that you want to understand another person's background or upbringing or religion or how it's been eh, being raised as the race that they are.

Faith perceived a classmate from Yemen to be racially different than herself. While persons from Yemen may be from multiple racial or ethnic categories, participants in my study consistently made a distinction between White persons and persons of Arab American or Middle

Eastern descent. Both Kimberly and Faith's quotations are difficult to read because they were spoken in one long, animated breath with very few pauses. During the interviews, both students showed they enjoyed the exchanges that were relayed to me in these two quotes. Kimberly and Faith's replies were interesting when compared with other students' interview responses. Particularly when talking about persons of Color, some students' answers were barely understandable and contained many long pauses and speech disfluencies. This observation is examined further in Chapter Seven.

When asked how aware she was of her own race, Abigail said she thought about it a lot more since moving to Midwestern University. She estimated she thought about her race "once a day at least" since moving on campus in September 2014. Further, she said,

Because I think [Midwestern University] is very diverse and I see so many different kinds of people so I, I guess I'm a people watcher. I kind of enjoy that. And, and watching other people, I definitely apply that to myself and so, I think about myself as well.

John also noted going to Midwestern University gave him a new and unique opportunity. "I think the diversity here has been a plus. Yeah, personally, because I get to learn about a lot of different backgrounds that I would not have learned about otherwise." Each of these student's responses was relayed with seeming sincerity and enthusiasm. The overall experience of being on a diverse campus provided students with what they depicted as positive opportunities to think about and reflect on their race. The next three subsections contain concrete examples of interactions and experiences study participants said caused them to perceive and better understand their own race while in college.

In-class and on-campus experiences

In the previous subsection, White students described that in general, just being on a campus with persons of Color was a unique experience that caused them to more deeply consider the meaning of their own race. In this subsection, I talk about more specific and time intensive in-class and on-campus experiences study participants said helped them to “see” their own race in more detail. This section includes examples of particular courses and assignments named by students as important and extracurricular activities such as student organizations, jobs, and internships that gave White students insight to their racial identity.

Classroom experiences. Each student in my study talked at length about how time spent in their classes and on campus at Midwestern University affected their ideas about being White and understanding other races. Students talked about listening to the lectures of their professors, hearing the stories of and interacting with their classmates, reading statistics in their coursework, and completing assignments. These activities provided new perspectives and caused students to consider their race in a more concrete way. Courses in the social sciences were noted as particularly powerful in causing study participants to have “aha” moments and discover new ideas about race. Both Faith and Kimberly mentioned their introductory psychology courses as influencing their perspectives on being White. Kimberly said in high school, she was not at all aware of or interested in her race. She said it was her introduction to psychology course at Midwestern University that sparked her current level of consciousness and activism. She said,

But, it was kind of, I became more interested ... part way because of college, and um, and as clichéd as it sounds, partly because of that intro to psych class where I was like, “Wow! This is cool! I want to learn more!” And part way because I became a lot more interested in, in social justice as a whole. I figured the best way to, to really become ... at

least in my own mind, a better member of society was to educate myself and to fully try to understand ... the privileges and the disadvantages I have because of ... where I come from, because of, who I am. And ... you know things I can change and things I can't change. I'm definitely very interested in ... the dirty "f" word; feminism (laugh). I'm very interested in feminism. I'm very interested in, you know ... the, the, you know, racism, and prejudice. I want to, it doesn't make sense that those things could still exist. In such, on such a broad scale to me. And, I just ... I think activism is something that I'm very interested in doing more of and I figured that the best way was to educate myself and to really, look beyond ... what I see every day as ... you know, a 21 year old White girl. And look at other people's perspectives, because, even when I compare kind of what I think now to what I thought in high school, it's like, "How didn't I notice all of this going on around me?!?"

I included this lengthy quote from Kimberly for several reasons. First, Kimberly joked about the clichéd experience of "discovering yourself" (emphasis mine) in your first college psychology class. Having that class early in her college career seemed to plant a seed of interest. Second, she spoke eloquently and emphatically about how the college experience changed her perspectives and caused her to develop and evolve. The initial experience in psychology prompted her to think about what it meant to be White, which caused her to seek out more knowledge. New information was the impetus for getting interested in issues of oppression, which led Kimberly to consider how activism and social justice could be parts of her life. Her answer ended with reflecting on her own progress with disbelief and a bit of embarrassment.

Other students mentioned having a kind of awakening in an introductory sociology course. Abigail talked about working with her White classmate on a project for her sociology

class. The assignment required students to create an item that represented their culture. Abigail explained how she and her White roommate struggled to complete this assignment. Referring to the conversation, Abigail said her roommate could not even start the assignment because she could not name anything that represented the White culture. Then Abigail said, “And I couldn’t really think of much either. There wasn’t one unified thing that I could really think of.” Both students in Abigail’s story as she represented it seemed to feel that being White meant lacking common, visible signs and symbols of culture. Although Abigail did not define what culture meant to her, neither of the White students could easily complete the requested assignment. That experience seemed to cause Abigail to question the meaning of her race at a more than superficial level. During our interview, she was still trying to determine why it was so difficult to complete what seemed like a simple assignment.

Several students said they had experiences in their sociology classes that made them realize biases and assumptions they held. Monroe talked about an assignment that required her to find photographs representing power. In her sociology class, she and other students were asked to display their findings on a screen in front of the class. Monroe said,

I was surprised, a lot of the Arabic people ... put pictures of [whispered] a Black, Black man. I didn’t even realize that my PowerPoint was a Black man with chains on. All I was looking for was a uniform, I never looked at faces, which I thought was kind of interesting ... I just saw the uniform and how less, less power they had. So it was about power it wasn’t about ... anything else for me.

Monroe said she recalled noticing immediately that several Arab American students in her class selected photographs featuring Black men exclusively. Then, she sheepishly admitted it did not even cross her mind that in addition to the picture she mentioned in the quote above, another of

her slides depicted a group of 12 Black men on a chain gang with their hands chained behind their back. She seemed embarrassed by this realization as she recounted it, and said the assignment caused her to question why she so quickly could see her Arabic classmates did something while she was blind to the fact she also made the same choice.

Half of my study participants talked in particular about how courses within their majors and/or fields of study influenced their understanding of being White and how they perceived other races. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the responses of Rachel, Marianne, Macy, Kimberly, and April and share their stories. When asked to identify an experience she had in college that caused her to think about her race, Rachel giggled and said, “Well, in my classes now (laugh) all the time.” A communications and culture studies major, Rachel said that in a women and gender studies class she started to understand her previous conceptions of being White were flawed. She said,

...these things I thought were just normal, everyday societal, you know, clichés per se. I, I really wasn't made aware of it until school and I'm really grateful for it too. Cuz I have a new perspective and a lot of people think that I'm... probably just on my soap box talking about stuff but and think that... what I'm talking about is ... I'm taking things too seriously ... and I think people take for granted the stereotypical norms that they probably wouldn't if they were a different race or a different ethnicity or the minority in the situation. And a lot of my friends and family, well my family, we're all considered White so we don't look at it from the other side.

Rachel talked about how reading and analyzing statistics in her classes helped to reveal that what she thought was “normal” was actually an almost exclusively White perspective. She admitted, “I will tell you that I didn't really think about race in general until these last couple of semesters

when it was put to me that race is a ... societal norm". The combined experience of reading course materials, discussing ideas in class, and reflecting on her own experiences propelled Rachel to consider changing her major to align her choice of major with these new found ideas. She said,

I feel like I try to look at the bigger picture, that not everyone has the same advantages ... You know, all these other things come in to play whereas before I'd just associate it with inner city Black kids. And now there's just more to a person than that – and I think that really, I really became more aware of it about a year ago when I started taking ... probably a year and a half ago when I changed—when I finally decided that this was going to be my major and I started taking these classes.

Rachel's comments show how her understanding of her own race is more nuanced since she began college. She admitted prior to taking some of the classes she mentioned, she was unaware of the elements of structural racism at work in the United States that prevent persons of Color from achieving the same level of education, wages, and quality of life as White persons.

Marianne, a political science major, spoke about how a Michigan history class that included study of the Civil Rights Movement affected her thinking about what it meant to be White and caused her to take action. She referenced several discussions in which her classmates talked about civil rights efforts in the past tense and as completed years ago. Marianne said she worked with a non-profit and knew many inequalities still persisted in society. She said,

... I see that what I was told growing up, like, 'Oh, the Civil Rights Movement was in the 60s and there's no racism anymore.' Like that's what I was told as a child and as I get older, no. I realize it's still there.

Marianne's experience made her question what she had previously been taught and as a result,

her current responsibilities in society based on having inaccurate information. She talked about attending a student conference recommended in her history class, and there she recognized she had to take action in her life based on what she had recently learned about equality. She said, "...the reiteration of what happened [in the Civil Rights Movement] kind of made me realize, I need to like, take a stand more so and uh, prevent this from happening again..." Marianne felt she was taking action by working for a non-profit focused on "inequality, justice, and dignity" and eventually hoped to start her own organization to do more of this work.

Macy, a criminal justice/sociology major, talked about how her college courses provided clarity and helped explain confusing racial events from her childhood that she could not grasp the meaning of at the time they occurred. She talked about how experiences in classes at Midwestern University provided her with information that changed her perspective about being White and resulted in the confidence to choose a different way of living as a White person than the one she was shown by family members. Macy told a particularly emotional story about taking an anthropology course focused on the history of the Detroit area, including the riots that occurred in 1967. She recalled childhood memories of seeing her father and other male family members yelling racial slurs at African Americans in the streets and sitting around the kitchen table talking about beating Black men. In class, Macy saw a documentary that included the Big Four, a special police squad consisting of White officers who were particularly abusive to Black men in the City of Detroit during the late 1960s. Macy described the moment of watching this film in class when she realized her family members were part of the Big Four. She said,

And I never thought it was real. And then we're sitting there [in class], and I mean, and I lost it. I was blubbing, and they [her classmates] were like, "What is wrong?" And I was like, "That was my uncle!" I never thought, I mean I grew up listening to the stories

and I never thought, they were real. I thought they were exaggerated and they [her family members] were making it up and ...

Macy described the horror she felt when she became conscious in that class of her family's involvement in the oppression and pain of her African American and Arab American classmates' families. She said her classmates had family members who lived in or near Detroit during the late 1960s. She said,

So my dad would tell me stories about when the riots were going on, that they were too close because you could see, you know, you could see Detroit from there and they would glow, how the sky would glow. So it was very hard to hear, because you know, they [her classmates' families] were there, their families were there and mine were here observing, um.

She talked about how this event had driven her to choose her major (criminal justice) in hopes of restoring some of what had been lost. Later, Macy explained how her college courses gave her the language and courage to challenge racism, both within her family and in society at large. She admitted she still struggled to address discrimination on a consistent basis, but she knew her ideas of what it meant to be White had changed since she began college and particularly, as a result of the anthropology course she mentioned.

Experiences in courses outside of the social sciences also had an influence on how the participants in my study viewed being White. Kimberly, an industrial and chemical engineering major who had previously mentioned the eye-opening effect of an introductory psychology course, talked about how a class discussion combined with a series of events at her internship caused her to identify several interesting White traits. First, she relayed that the majority of the engineers with whom she worked were White males over the age of 50 years old. She referred to

them collectively by the name “Greg” earlier to signify that they seemed to have common characteristics, including talking first, believing their opinions to be “right” and assuming their experience was the common human experience. Kimberly told me about two conversations at work involving clients who were outside of the United States. In the first story, she and the senior White male engineer were on the phone with a plant in Mexico that was experiencing a mechanical failure. Kimberly’s approach was to ask the engineers in Mexico to describe the problem from their perspective on the floor at the plant. Greg’s response was to become irritated with her and instead tell the engineers in Mexico how to solve the problem from his perspective, which Kimberly said seemed incorrect since she and Greg were not in Mexico and could not see the equipment they were discussing. She said to Greg, “You’re not even going to consider somebody else’s perspective when they probably have a better look at the big picture than you?” Kimberly then said she noticed it was very common for White, male engineers in her office to speak very loudly when talking on the phone with another country where English is the second language. She acknowledged that often times, there were noises from machines that caused intermittent difficulties with hearing some words in a conversation with these locations. Overall, the “Gregs” seemed noticeably impatient when speaking with persons for whom English was a second language. She said,

So, I didn’t, I thought everybody, if you don’t understand someone, say, “Could you repeat that?” I thought everybody did that. But, that’s not common, which I thought was very weird! And, a lot of engineers I work with, and I said this was even brought up in an engineering class, they’ll just talk *louder*. And it’s like, “Why are you talking louder if you don’t understand them?!?” (laugh)

Kimberly was shocked the engineers she worked with did not ask for clarification, but instead

assumed their position was correct and amplified their voices to signify this fact. Based on her experiences with male co-workers and discussions in an engineering course, Kimberly observed that inflexibility was a White male trait. Kimberly also noted that engineering is a notoriously White male dominated field and wondered how these White traits affected the field overall.

When asked about experiences she had in college that caused her to think about her race, April, an education major and graduate student, talked about her multiculturalism in education course. Several times during both interviews, April talked about feeling very uncomfortable in this course. She said, "I feel like ... I have to *defend* myself for things I didn't do ... like historical things." She said she felt this way because she is White and other students in the class, particularly those who are not White, did not accept her responses and opinions as valid. April shared an interaction that occurred recently in the class between herself and an African American classmate on the subject of interracial dating. At the time of the interviews, April said she had a bi-racial boyfriend who is White and African American. She said, "...I was told, this was said by an, um, older African American woman, that the only reason that a Black man would want to date a White girl is because they are 'freaks in the bedroom'". April talked about feeling insecure and second guessing herself during discussions in this and other classes where African Americans are present. She felt being White meant she would be singled out and ridiculed. Later in this section, I discuss this theme related to Whites' feelings and reactions when in a group that is not majority White. Despite the variation across majors and program, the five White students profiled in this subsection provided examples of classroom interactions, readings, and discussions that triggered the students to think about being White in new and different ways while in college.

Cocurricular experiences. In this study, several students mentioned experiences they had outside of college classes that shaped their ideas about their own race and that of others. Students talked about Midwestern University being home to a multitude of registered student organizations that sponsored events on campus. Macy talked about how “diverse” and “inclusive” the student organizations are at Midwestern. She said, “everything’s open to everybody on campus”. John expressed a similar feeling and indicated the student organization to which he belonged had a “pretty wide range of people”. April, who attended two other higher education institutions prior to being at Midwestern, noted she saw “Albanian American, Armenian American and Yemen American” organizations on this campus and thought that was exciting. She said,

... At [Midwestern University] it’s more specific, instead of generalizing the ethnicities or the races. Here it’s um ... not just, the Arabic, Arabic community, it’s the different countries that make up that community. So, it kind of makes ... it it shows that they’re unique? But that they’re really, like we’re really all one and the same, we’re all ...you, know, I don’t know if that makes any sense?

When I asked her to explain further what she meant, April compared her current experience at Midwestern University to being at previous institutions that only had Black or Hispanic student unions and fraternities. She said,

...I have quite a few Albanian classmates. And that club in particular is extremely involved in the campus and in the community. Um ... so ... I think because ... the students that are in these organizations are so passionate about promoting positive images of their ... um, nationality or their ethnicity or heritage that, um ... (long pause) I haven’t felt ... racial tension being here. I just ... I don’t know if I haven’t, I don’t know, I can’t

... speak for everybody. But, I've been here for, about ... a year and a half and I haven't, I haven't felt anything negative in regards to that.

April seemed to express surprise and relief that the various cultural and ethnic affiliated student organizations on campus at Midwestern University co-existed peacefully. Her comments are interesting because they illustrated reflection on past experience and how she was thinking about race at the time we met. April used the words "positive images" to describe the Albanian community and yet seemed to expect there would be "racial tension" on campus based on her previous experiences at another institution that had a number of Black and Hispanic student organizations.

Working on and off campus also was mentioned as a college experience that helped shape ideas about racial identity for my study participants. Faith, a non-traditional student who worked on campus full-time while taking classes part-time, said she felt her job on campus provided her with many opportunities to have conversations with other persons about race. She said,

Um, because I feel like I've had more interactions with people through my work than I have through my classes. Classes, you're very, you're very sheltered. You're usually discussing whatever uh, the class topic is, which kind of, um, I don't want to say protects conversations, but it definitely guides conversations. And, and then normally, you're busy walking to and from class and so, unfortunately, I haven't had a lot of, I'm not part of um, like, uh, Greek life or anything like that. Um ... (long pause) so I guess, I've been lucky in the fact that my interactions professionally have also guided my feelings of what campus is like.

Faith's response raises important questions about how adult learners, particularly those who are

only on campus for classes, experience their race while in higher education. This subsection contains examples of students describing conversations and events inside and outside of college classes that caused them to notice being White, which in many cases led students to reflect on the meaning of their own race. In the next subsection, I examined how participants' dialogues with persons of Color also resulted in heightened racial awareness.

Hearing the Stories of Persons of Color

In this study, some students described through interacting with persons of Color on campus they more clearly recognized the privileges they had as a result of being White. These participants said having close, personal conversations with and hearing the day-to-day struggles persons of Color experienced as a result of their race made an impression they will long remember. A few participants also described feeling somewhat intimidated and having anxiety from contacts with persons of Color. In this subsection, the following is explored: one-on-one interactions that led Whites to consider their own race, hearing stories of racism from persons of Color, and interactions between White women and African American men.

Talking with persons who were not White was mentioned as something that prompted students in my study to think about their race. When asked on a daily basis how aware she was of her race, Faith said, "...I don't usually think about it until I'm in a situation with other people." Later, when asked how being White impacted her daily life, Faith responded, "Um ... (long pause) ... well, and I think about it in levels, so, my daily life, I don't think about it that much until I'm in a situation where I see somebody else." Faith described a process in which she saw a person she perceived as different than herself, talked with the person and heard their experiences and struggles, thought about her lack of struggle in that area, and then realized she had privilege. April, a student who spoke about being in a dating relationship with a bi-racial

male student, described a similar process of becoming aware of the privileges being White bestowed on her. She said,

You know, you don't realize how much it means until you're, you see something first-hand, like you see somebody who is not given the benefit of the doubt and how much it affects them.

Throughout her interviews, April gave examples of being with her boyfriend and seeing challenging experiences he had due to his race, which prompted her to think about how being White meant having certain benefits. She relayed conversations she and her boyfriend had about their perceptions of these challenging experiences. April and Faith both saw, heard, reflected, and realized what it meant to be White through their communications with someone of another race.

Hearing persons of Color share their own stories about racism was another powerful way students in my study learned about privilege. Marianne talked about a leadership training focused on structural racism she attended. During this workshop, speakers talked about their histories with discrimination and intolerance. Marianne said hearing these stories caused her to be conscious of the privileges of being White. She said,

And, as they're discussing their horrible experiences and really unfortunate experiences about, you know, being uh, abused and whatnot because just their skin color or different cultural background, um, I, I realized, um, I don't have to deal with that, you know. And that's when I was, it's really strongly, "Oh!" You know ... you know, "I'm White." And because of that, I don't, people don't pick on me because of my color, you know.

Marianne's voice was strong and certain when she spoke about this memory. She sounded angry at the end of this quote, when she recognized the disparity between her own comfortable

experience and those of the people she heard talk about how prejudice and intolerance had affected their individual lives. Similarly, April sounded frustrated when she told me about a discussion in which her classmate said he felt very unsafe when he was away from campus. She said,

He's um ... Arabic and he's Muslim. He looks like just a regular White guy, has green eyes, you know. But um, he said if he is [on campus] people don't notice him for his race. But if he were to go somewhere else, they automatically notice him and that's not a good thing.

April said her classmate looked like "just a regular White guy" which is interesting because according to the racial categories used for the U.S. Census questionnaire, persons who identify as Arabic would select the White category. April and perhaps the Arabic student himself would not have placed themselves in the same racial category. In both of the conversations Marianne and April relayed to me, hearing first-hand accounts of people talking about lived experiences with racism caused the students to hear, believe, and empathize with the speakers and better understand White privilege.

Kimberly's response showed a deeper reflection upon her race that transpired due to a friendship with a classmate of Color. She talked about a Hispanic friend she met while in college with whom she is close and had shared many conversations. Kimberly said that on the subject of the importance of family, she and her friend's views were in almost perfect alignment. However, she also saw first-hand how his life experiences related to race resulted in him having different perspectives. Kimberly told a story about being in the car with her friend when he was pulled over by the police. She said,

And it was so odd because, you know, you know I've been pulled over before for, you know, traffic stuff. And the cop is always very nice to me, they're polite, you know. But when he [her friend] got pulled over, you know, they got him out of the car immediately, they patted him down. They were just, like, very aggressive. And I was just like, does this always happen? ... He said it had happened to him before and, it's funny, because he's like one of the sweetest, nicest people I know.

Kimberly named racism as the reason her friend was treated aggressively. She explained that over the years, she noticed his viewpoints about school, work, or other aspects of life had been quite unlike hers. After being with him in the car when he was profiled by police officers, she explained she had evidence of just how dissimilar their lives had been, and wondered if his outlooks and opinions were affected by events like this. She said,

Sometimes it kind of, it kind of makes me pause because it's different from other perspectives I have seen so it kind of makes me wonder, OK, well how much of this is related to just us being different people and how much is related to, you know, different genders? But how much is also related to your experience as a non-White person in society?

Additionally, April and Faith talked about hearing male friends and family members—all persons of Color—tell their stories about being pulled over repeatedly by law enforcement for small infractions. During each of the incidents, the men described feeling like the police were “fishing for something” (April) and the men were worried they would not answer the police officers' questions sufficiently. Profiling was also the subject of another story Kimberly relayed. She mentioned a discussion from her sociology class in which Muslim students talked about being profiled at the airport. One female classmate's story disturbed Kimberly, who described

trying to imagine what the experience was like for her colleague, whose father was told his name was very close to another person on a terrorist watch list. Kimberly said,

...even though it's not the same name, even though it's just somewhat similar, probably because of, you know, culture, where they're from, is just my guess. He's pulled over, he's questioned every single time. And it's just kind of interesting, because, I don't think they're going to pull over ... a Mohammed almost every time but they're not going to pull over a Joe Smith. ... And it kind of made me think, because you know, my dad is the most harmless looking man ever (laugh). Um, you know, your quintessential balding engineer with glasses (laugh). But it just kind of struck me that, it is very possible that she has the same view of *her* dad, as, you know, I mean that is her dad! So she obviously, most likely thinks that he's like this harmless, cuddly, man but the fact that ... because he's not White, he probably has so many different experiences because of that, just kind of made me think for a second.

April, Faith, and Kimberly each said they had moments of awareness and frustration while hearing or observing these real-life accounts and learned being White meant they were treated much better than their friends of Color in these types of situations.

Being in a Group or Situation that is Not White

Earlier in this section, I reported the responses White students made as a result of being at Midwestern University—which they perceived as a very diverse campus. This environment provided opportunities for White students to have interactions with and friendships with persons of other races—something most of my participants did not experience prior to college. These contacts and communications caused a number of students in this study to learn more about their own race. Another scenario participants said caused them to notice their own race was being in

groups that were not primarily White. When put in a situation where they were the only one or one of few White persons in a room, students quickly noticed their own race. Another scenario discussed was the interaction between White women and Black men. Examples of these experiences are included in this section.

When asked to think of a time when she was aware of being White, Abigail talked about attending the meeting of a student organization on campus at Midwestern University. She noted the attendees were primarily Indian, Arabic, and Asian. She used the word “unusual” to describe how she felt. She said,

I think that was one of the times I was like, “Wow! I’m the only White person here!” ...

I ... I don’t think I was surprised by it? I just thought it was kind of interesting because it was just kind of unusual. I’m not used to those types of situations.

Abigail talked enthusiastically about her experience at the student organization meeting and said she was definitely planning on continuing to be a part of that group. Earlier in the interview, she talked about being disappointed when she came to Midwestern University because she expected to be paired with roommates of other races and was not. Abigail seemed to welcome being in the racial minority and came to college expecting to have this experience.

The words “odd” and “weird” were used by Kimberly when she told me about an off-campus party where she was one of only two White persons in attendance. She explained her boyfriend grew up in Detroit, and was one of very few White persons living in his childhood neighborhood. His good friend invited them to a birthday party. Of this event, Kimberly said,

It was just like, “We are the only White people in the room.” It was just kind of weird because it’s not something you really think about, you know, you don’t really put yourself into a minority’s shoes. And then, it wasn’t a bad experience or anything, in

which I am lucky because I know a lot of minorities do have bad experiences being minorities. But, it was more weird than anything else, just kind of a newness.

Consistently throughout both interviews, Kimberly demonstrated an awareness and sensitivity to the fact that even though she experienced situations similar to those of persons of Color, she realized being White afforded her distinct privileges and better treatment. She used the word “lucky” in the quote above to describe her privilege, and her tone conveyed regret that Whites had an unfair advantage racially.

Both Marianne and April used the phrase “when I’m in the minority” to answer the question, “On a daily basis, how aware are you that you are White?” Although she first quickly stated she was not usually aware of being White, Marianne added, “Um, with an exception of, this is bad, but when I go to Detroit, I am aware of it ... Like when I’m in, like, the minority.” Later in her interview, Marianne said she often does work in the city of Detroit and works with primarily Black groups there. She did not seem to realize the conflict in her statements: if she was frequently in Detroit and usually thought of her race while she was there, that would constitute “on a daily basis”. April also answered this question by mentioning African American persons. When asked about her daily awareness of race, she said she perceived her own race more quickly when she was not among mostly White persons. She said,

I think I notice them more than I notice myself. So if I’m in a room and there are 50 people and the majority are White but there are a few, um, a few African Americans or something like that, I will notice them in relation to me as opposed to me in relation to them. But, um, if I am outnumbered, if I’m the minority, then I will immediately notice my own race.

When comparing these responses to the earlier experiences of Abigail and Kimberly, there were

clear differences. While Abigail and Kimberly noted they were one of few or the only White persons in the room, they talked about initial but brief discomfort and then interest. For Marianne and April, the events they described of being in the racial minority evoked fear and a loss of safety. Use of words such as “outnumbered” and phrases like “this is bad” suggest being in the racial minority was an uncomfortable experience and one that was not typical for Marianne and April. The diversity in responses of these participants and others included in this subsection is interesting considering that all four students came from primarily White neighborhoods and schools prior to attending college.

Interactions between White women and Black men were highlighted by three female participants in this study. There was an undertone of sexuality present in each account as well as an underlying fear of how the interactions were perceived publically. Rachel talked about being at a meeting with her boss. She said,

... like I wonder if people are thinking, “Who’s this Black man and who’s this White girl?” I will say like, I often wonder if people think anything about the two of us when we are out together because he’s going on 67 now, he looks younger for his age, he, but he’s a tall, thin Black man and I’m a, I think, a fairly good-looking younger White woman, and I often wonder if people think anything about that. I think about that daily when we are out, actually. I don’t know that it affects how I act or present myself ... well then, I take that back—it *does* affect how I present myself because I try to act very professional, and which I should anyway in that environment, but more so that I don’t want people to get the wrong idea about anything and, where, if, I, if he was my boss and he was White I probably wouldn’t think so much about it, and that affects me daily.

Rachel's comments are interesting because she started to say that how she is perceived in public did not affect her actions and then had a moment of realization and admitted she did alter her behavior due to fears people would assume her relationship with her boss was sexual due to his race and gender. Later in the interview, she referenced a popular American stereotype that "Black guys date White women and it's not usually the other way around". This idea was echoed by April who talked about her perceptions of the difference between being a White woman on a predominantly White campus and being a White woman on a campus where there were a number of Black men. April said,

So, I don't remember ever hearing ... um, minority women being, yelled at or whistled at or anything like that [on a predominantly White campus]. I don't remember any of that and I feel like I would have, especially since two of my friends were, they were athletes, and they were African American.

Later, April offered she was very intimidated and embarrassed when Black men made what she called "cat calls" at her when she was at a university that had a significant Black population. She wondered if this was a "cultural difference or what?" In both of Rachel and April's answers, there was an undercurrent of sexuality and anxiety suggested in the stories of White women interacting with Black men. Both of these students were aware of stereotypes present in American society that stigmatize interracial dating and place a particular label on those who engage in it. Listening to these students' voices and considering their perceptions is important to understand how White students interpret the intersections of race and gender and as a result may or may not engage in conversations across these identities—a theme discussed later in this section. At the same time, educators must challenge stereotypes when students raise them in and out of the classroom. This study suggests there are benefits in engaging White students in

conversation and reflection about their own race, and taking an intersectional approach to these discussions may be useful in reaching White students.

Experience with Another Element of Identity

When I asked questions about race in my study, some participants talked instead about another way they identified themselves. Over half of the students I interviewed talked about either gender or age when asked questions about their racial experiences. Female participants brought up both gender and age, with some saying that an event related to either led them to also think about being White. In this section, responses tying both gender and age to race are examined.

Several students talked about how being female and experiencing oppression as a woman led them to an increased awareness of racism. Kimberly said, "...once one thing that's kind of messed up about society is pointed out to you, you see more and more." An internship in the field of engineering, which Kimberly noted is very much a White male dominated field, caused her to consider various other oppressive elements in society. She talked about her experiences being the only woman on a male team at her internship,

... it's one thing to read about it but then it's another thing to go to work and and to interact with, you know, other people and especially other engineers and, and it's kind of, it's almost, eye-opening but also kind of sad sometimes where I'll go to work and somebody will make a comment to me that's meant with good intentions but I'm like, "That's kind of like an insult! Why would you say that to me?" So ... I mean that kind of spawned off into definitely being more interested in you know privilege, you know, monetary versus race versus, you know, cultural differences. It kind of sparked my interest.

In both interviews, Kimberly described a process of experiencing inequality as a woman and then noticing ways in which other persons were oppressed, such as due to race and social class. She said, "I'm not really sure if I can separate being White and being female, seeing as I am both." This idea of thinking about race through accessing experiences of gender was also described by Faith, who talked about knowing the "struggle" of being a woman and then said,

But, when I'm around someone who's maybe talking about their background and, and struggles they've had, that's when I really notice, "Oh, well, OK, I know what it's like to be female and struggle against these things, but being White, there's these little privileges that I didn't even realize all along the way until I'm talking with someone else and realize they didn't have those same, same experiences.

Faith described being with persons of Color and hearing them talk about racial struggles caused her to first identify with the person due what she perceived as the shared experience of fighting against injustice. Then, she soon realized being White provided her with additional benefits, which caused her to acknowledge racism. At the end of her first interview, Marianne suggested I add the dimension of gender to my research because she thought studying how White college students understand race was not enough. She talked about her thinking related to gender and race,

...when I look at race, I often, like "Oh! I can relate because I'm a female!" Like, that's a minority and people treat me differently because I'm a female. So, I think that there, you can do like, White, then males and females, and then of color, and then males and females. Because I think that, for instance, the White male, they are more, like, predominant and they might see things differently than a White female. And maybe perhaps a White female might be more empathetic for what's happening in like

minorities because we are often grouped with minorities.

Marianne's suggestion showed she thought gender and race were linked in important ways. Earlier in her interview, Marianne told a story that provided some additional insight to her thinking about how race, gender, and age operate as intersecting pieces of her overall identity. She talked about often working in predominantly Black areas and going to meetings where she is the only White person in the room. Marianne said she felt persons of Color have not taken her seriously in the past because she is a "young, White female" and she wondered if it was the combination of these identities that caused conflict or one particular element. She described one recent meeting where this occurred. She said,

Like as a few of the representatives came in they shook on, everyone else's hand except mine ... like ... is it because I'm female? Is it because I'm young? Or is it because I'm White? Well, there's another female there my age but she's of color. And then there's other people my age but they're guys and they're of color, like, so why? Why?

Marianne said the persons in the room did not make eye contact with her and it was not until she spoke and made "a good point" that the meeting attendees acknowledged her presence. The two quotes above are conflicting in that Marianne seemed to say first that as a woman, she understood the difficulties persons of Color endured because "we are often grouped with minorities". However, in the second quote, she failed to understand how her race might have shaped interactions in a group that was not all White. Marianne's quotes are indicative of the contradictions I noted often throughout this study: White students seemed very aware of their race at times and then completely unaware at other times within the span of just a few hours.

While Marianne wondered if she was taken less seriously due to being younger, non-traditional students described being very aware of the stigma of being older while at Midwestern

University. Each of the six students over the age of 23 in my study talked about age when asked about the experience of being a White college student. Macy used the phrase “it was more the age thing” three times in her first interview when asked to describe her racial identity. She began her college career at Midwestern in her early 40s and talked about feeling unprepared in the classroom. Macy said most of her first year taking classes meant she was “double doing” the work because she was not familiar with many of the books, assignments, and expectations of professors. She said she first had to figure out what it meant to do things like “take notes” before moving on to course content. She said,

For me, it was more the age thing ... I’m talking Speech 105 and I’m the oldest person in there and we have the BK Handbook, which is, you know, like your little English cheat sheet book and we’re in class and the professor says, you know, “Now what are the, oh I don’t know, possessive pronouns?” And I’m like ...and they just all, in alphabetical order, and there’s like 46 of them and I’m like, “Shit!” (laugh). I’m like looking through the book, “Where is that?!?”

Macy, Monroe, and Wayne told me they were often the oldest students in their classes at Midwestern University, and this meant they worked harder and struggled more than other students. Early in the first interview, I asked Monroe to tell me about herself as a student. She said, “Um, struggling every single day *at* learning every single day because I’m older.” When asked if they thought most other White students shared their ideas about race, both Monroe and Wayne provided similar answers. “No ... I’m, uh, a dinosaur (laugh). You know, I was raised in a whole different era” said Wayne, a 67 year-old student. Monroe, age 56, responded to the same question, “I don’t know if they do because there’s such an age gap with me and the other students”. Repeatedly throughout both interviews, the non-traditional students in this study

talked about their age when asked about race. Their responses were markedly different from the quotes about gender mentioned earlier in this section in that students who mentioned gender talked about feeling like they could understand persons of Color more due to a shared experience of oppression. However, for students who talked about being older in college, their comments indicated they felt more isolated and apart from all other students due to their age. Monroe noted professors repeatedly called on younger students in the class before calling on her. She also talked about feeling left out of social dynamics within the classroom, first mentioning age and then race. She said, “I’m not really in anyone’s clique because I’m not of their age, I’m not of their color. Although I try to be, I always try to be, but they won’t let you in.”

In this subsection, I showed that some participants in my study considered age and gender as important or more important than their race. When asked to talk about their racial identity, female students said gender often was a gateway to understanding racism. When asked about race, non-traditional interviewees in my study talked about feeling very visible or invisible to others due to being the oldest students in the class.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented study participants’ responses to my research questions of: What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race? For those who can “see” their race, what events led to this occurrence? I provided students’ direct descriptions of what it meant to be White while in college and discussed factors that influenced their definitions. Chapter Five included a number of educational and other experiences my participants said affected how they viewed their own race. Much of their discussion centered on being able to identify their race as a result of being on a campus they perceived as diverse and having interactions with persons of Color. In Chapter Six, I move from explicit answers given in

response to my study questions to instead examine two themes that emerged related to talking about race and racism.

CHAPTER SIX: DESIRE TO DISCUSS RACE AND RACISM

In Chapter Five, I showed how a group of White college students at Midwestern University described their experience of race. I examined the factors these students said helped them perceive their own race and define it in a society that is predominantly White. The information provided in Chapter Five directly answered the research questions posed at the outset of this study. In this chapter, I explore two important themes that emerged during my research: participants' desire and ability to talk about race and their awareness of racism. Since the Metropolitan Detroit area is identified as one of the most segregated racial and ethnic areas in the United States, I was particularly interested in what White students attending Midwestern University saw, heard, or discussed related to their own race. The following sections detail my observations about students' willingness to engage in conversations about their race, the reasons they have disengaged from racial discussions in the past, and their ideas about racism. Examining these themes provided additional context and depth in response to this study's areas of inquiry about the nature of the experiences of White college students and the events that contributed to White students' perception and understanding of their own race.

Desire and Ability to Discuss Race

Students in my study said Midwestern University promoted an inclusive feeling and climate, which encouraged them to talk openly about race. Evidence of this is shared first. Then, my conversations with several students who demonstrated a particularly open approach to discussing their own race are summarized. These sketches provide ideas about the experiences, conditions and environments that enabled students to engage with me in free and seemingly unguarded dialogues about their experiences of race. Then, an examination of the factors that students said prevented them from easily discussing race follows. Reasons students provided for

not wanting to talk about race included friends and family members, and perceived power differentials with other persons due to age, gender, position/role, and race.

Midwestern University: “A Special Kind of Bubble”

My interviewees said Midwestern University was a “unique” place where open dialogue was expected and encouraged. Students told me Midwestern had a reputation for being a very inclusive school and there was evidence of this in many places on campus. These qualities contributed to students feeling safe to engage with me in conversations about being White. Abigail talked about how much she looked forward to moving on campus and starting her college experience at Midwestern, which she purposely chose for its diversity. She said she was eager to leave her primarily White hometown and “closed-minded” high school. “I think college just makes people a little bit more liberal in their thinking. And a little more ... open” said Abigail. When she found out her roommates at Midwestern University were also White, she said she was quite disappointed as she hoped to meet and live with persons of other races as part of the college experience. However, Abigail said she found other ways to connect with persons who were not White, particularly in her classes. She noted her classes at Midwestern were much more racially diverse than those of her high school, which enabled her to have more opportunities to meet students of Color.

Faith also expected to connect with a diverse group of people through her college career at Midwestern University. She, too, left a primarily White upbringing in a rural area. She came as an adult learner to Midwestern, which she described as “a special kind of bubble” that enabled persons to expand their education by providing a safe and nurturing environment to talk across difference. She said,

...when people are on a college campus, they are working for a goal to better themselves,

so most of the time they are going to be more open to having these kinds of intelligent conversations with people that are different than themselves.

Faith described her time in college as interesting and pleasurable and exhibited a desire to talk openly about issues of race, religion, traditions, and more. She described Midwestern University as a “really cool campus in the fact that I think people are open to discussing differences.” A day before our second interview, Faith had a conversation at her job on campus with a graduate student who was Romanian and Polish and another student from Yemen. She added that as a White, non-traditional student, her conversation was a thrilling exchange and something she appreciated. “I like being on this campus because I think there is a lot of openness” she said. Faith also said that with practice, she had become aware of her own ideas and biases during these conversations and tried to suspend judgment and truly listen and learn during such discussions. Both Faith and Abigail said the campus climate at Midwestern University met their expectations related to being an amenable environment for learning about and meeting persons of diverse backgrounds. The quotes of Abigail and Faith are two examples illustrating an idea shared by all students in my participant pool at some level: Midwestern University provided a distinctive space where diversity was expected, respected, and could be discussed. In the next section, I examine the responses of three participants to demonstrate the range of understandings White college students had about their race and their related ability and desire to discuss race.

Sketches of Students Eager to Discuss Race

Participants in my study were at a variety of places in their racial consciousness development, with no two students’ journeys being identical. In this section, I feature three students whose responses showed me just how multifaceted and paradoxical the development of racial identity is for White college students. I selected the stories of Rachel, Abigail, and April

to highlight their unique positions related to White racial identity, demonstrate the variability of racial consciousness, and consider the ease with which they discussed a topic avoided by many of their White peers. Each of these students were engaged during the interviews and seemed candid when telling me their stories and about the events that shaped their current understanding of their race. Additionally, I included a discussion with Wayne about an interaction he had with a classmate that was thought-provoking and challenging.

Throughout her interviews, Rachel displayed a pensiveness and yearning to know more information about race and oppression. She seemed keenly interested in the topic of my study, took her time considering the questions, and often stopped midstream while responding to change previous answers due to what seemed like sudden realizations. During our first interview, she said, “I was just telling someone if I could take a class or two every semester, just for fun, just so I could just become more educated and aware about things...” Rachel, who was 30 years old at the time of our interview, showed what seemed to be a new and intense awareness of how much she did not know about other cultures, and a willingness to learn more. For her first interview, I met Rachel at her parents’ home in Dearborn, which is noted to have one of the largest concentrations of Arab American residents in the United States. When asked what her experience was like being a student in the most segregated racial/ethnic area in the country, Rachel said,

I feel that I don’t know a lot about a culture [Arabic] that I’ve lived in for the last 14-16 years and that um ... I’m almost ... as like part of a ... I mean, a White student in the middle of that, I go to school with a mixture of people in my classes, yet I don’t really know anybody ... or anything about them. And that goes for, I mean, White people too, I suppose, but, I mean ... there’s this culture in my backyard that I really don’t know a

whole lot about.

In this response, Rachel described feeling isolated, realizing she had not intentionally engaged on a personal level with either White persons or persons of Color in her neighborhood or at school. During our conversations, Rachel displayed examples of having sudden realizations I mentioned earlier in this section. She seemed to be processing her ideas and making meaning while we spoke during the interviews. She talked more about the Arabic and Muslim populations she now encountered frequently and said she and her mother saw a movie that depicted these cultures as very misogynistic. She said,

I still don't know—I've never really *talked* to anybody about that from that culture to know if that's *really* what they've experienced. Everything I know about the cultures, you know, that I encounter on a daily basis whether it be in the neighborhood or school is based on stereotypes because I don't *know* anything for myself. Kinda sad actually (nervous laugh). Yeah ... (long pause) wow. OK.

As I reviewed the transcripts of my interview with Rachel, I realized I would have like to ask her why she had not engaged more fully with Arabic students since she had such a curiosity about the culture.

When I interviewed Rachel the first time, I observed from her facial expressions and pauses that she was considering seriously the issues we were discussing. At the beginning of our second interview, I asked Rachel if there was anything she thought of since we last talked that might relate to my study. She excitedly mentioned three incidents that occurred in between our meetings when she thought about issues involving race, stereotypes, and privilege. She talked about how her classes caused her to notice inequalities in society, and said, "I probably would never have thought that before these last couple years." Due to time restrictions on my part, I

brought both interviews to what felt like premature closes, observing that Rachel would have liked to continue these conversations.

Another student who was interested and engaged during both interviews was 18-year-old Abigail. While only in her second semester of studies at Midwestern University at the time of our meetings, Abigail talked about how much she liked her classes, living on campus, and the college life. She responded very quickly to the invitation to join my study, and talked about her reaction to seeing the email. She said

...I was really interested when I saw the title [White College Students Who Can “See” Their Own Race: A Qualitative Study of Midwestern University]. I said, ‘Wow!’ We study how, usually, how White people act to other races. And we don’t focus on what’s actually happening to them [White students], how they’re changing.

When I asked Abigail why she wanted to talk about the subject of my study, she said she always felt strongly about “this stuff” but did not have opportunities to talk about race in high school. During our discussion, she characterized her high school as racist and closed-minded, suggesting there were few occasions to engage in discussions of race in a positive and healthy way. At the end of our first interview when I asked if she had any suggestions for my study, she said,

I would give advice to, like the younger high school students though ... I would definitely tell them to go to college and to go somewhere that, you don’t feel comfortable completely. Like, just don’t go somewhere that is really maybe right by home, that’s ... all people that are similar to you. Go somewhere different ... I guess I would tell people to just make yourself a little uncomfortable and that would help.

Abigail talked with pride about how she made such a choice to attend a college that was out of her comfort zone. Reflecting on this decision midway through her second semester, she said she

was pleased with the results. At the end of our first interview, Abigail added, “I’ve, I’ve [sic] really glad that I got to talk to you about this stuff.”

Similarly, several times during our interviews, April expressed she was appreciative to have a space to talk about being a White college student and what race meant to her. When I asked if she had conversations about race with other White students, April said that she had never done this. Instead, she spoke about how she and her boyfriend (who is bi-racial) talked at length about stereotypes, stigmas, and the future. They hoped to work together in careers in education to break down racial barriers with youth. Within moments of beginning our first interview, April told me she was very interested in my study because,

It’s the, it’s such an unusual topic ... and in my classes we talk a lot about what it’s like to be every other race but White. So it’s kind of nice to finally have somebody that listens to me, as a White student, instead of I get to listen to everybody else about their experiences, so.

Throughout both interviews, April talked about struggling between showing her inquisitive nature about other races and feeling unaccepted by persons of Color—particularly African American persons. She shared with me several negative and violent experiences she had with individuals, and said she was grappling with what these events meant in relation to her ideas about equality and her goals as an educator. She said,

One of the reasons why I wanted to do this [participate in the study] was because, nobody asks ... White people what we think. They, um, generalize ... our beliefs based on who, who speaks the loudest. Um, but ... nobody actually asks us what we think about anything. In regards to, the country, our, our heritage, or ... college, our friends. I don’t think that anybody ... I don’t know. I think they feel that ... I think that minorities feel

that ... our... voice has already been heard.

During the semester we met, April was struggling with being a White student talking about culture and race in a classroom that was not primarily White. April provided me with much to think about related to why White college students do or may not engage in conversations involving race based on their prior experiences and their current state of racial consciousness. April wanted to talk about race with me and her boyfriend, but did not feel she could be as free in other spaces. This idea is explored more fully in the next section where I examine why talking about being White was difficult for my participants in some circumstances.

Nine of the 10 students I interviewed wanted to keep talking and lingered long after I stopped the audio recorders and formally ended our interviews. Some walked me to my car in an effort to continue the conversation. Others asked me to email them if I happened to have any articles or information about “this stuff.” They asked me to contact them when my dissertation was complete and published because they wanted to know what other students said and how they answered my questions. I was surprised at how genuinely curious and eager students were to talk about the questions and issues raised in my study, even after they received their \$25 gift card for participation and could end our conversation easily.

One exchange in particular had a powerful impact on me. Wayne was the first student I interviewed as part of this study. Within only moments of beginning my interview protocol, Wayne said, “So, um yes ... I’m prejudiced (laugh)” after telling me he thought illegal immigrants who were children should be sent to prison despite their young ages. By the end of our second interview, I heard some responses from Wayne that did not align with my views on race. I remember thinking about the importance of maintaining an unbiased view as a researcher and truly listening to my participants’ without judgment but wondering if all my interviews

would be *this* difficult for me. Then, after I turned off the recorder at our second interview, Wayne told me a story about an experience he had with an Arab American student in one of his classes. He said he disliked her from the start and judged her because of her ethnicity and background. Then, he worked with her on a group project and after many weeks, was completely amazed at how his ideas about her and feelings about her changed. He began to get tears in his eyes during this portion of our meeting when he told me he wrote a paper about his changed perspective and read it in one of his classes. He said, “I couldn’t get emotional there, but I cried like a baby afterwards at home.” Wayne explained that due to his hard life and time spent in poverty and prison, he learned not to be vulnerable in any way in front of other people. He told me the experience of getting to know this one Arab American student very personally completely changed him. When I asked him why he chose to tell me this story after the interview, he said he just remembered and thought it was important for my research.

During this study, I was fortunate to have 20 meaningful conversations with 10 diverse and complex White college students about their evolving and sometimes contradictory definitions of what it meant to be White and how they came to that understanding. Despite my efforts to not bring bias and assumptions to the interviews, I realized these were present when my participants said things that took me by surprise. Although at times I disagreed with their viewpoints or wanted to challenge their perspectives, I appreciated their honesty and willingness to engage with me in the difficult and necessary act of discussing and trying to understand what it means to be White.

Factors that Prevent/Inhibit White Students from Discussing Race

I heard participants provide a variety of reasons why they did not feel comfortable talking about race as a White college student. Although my interviewees were willing to talk about

being White, several students believed most other Whites must be forced into the conversation. Social circles and family members were cited as barriers to open discussion about being White and race. Various power differentials were identified as making participants feel less likely to dialogue about race, including those presented by older persons, faculty, and family members. White students also talked about feeling anxious to discuss race in the presence of persons of Color. Each of these themes is addressed in this section.

Whites need to be “forced to” talk about race. Several interviewees told me most other White students would not willingly talk about race unless they were “forced to.” Rachel said the majority of White people are oblivious to race, gender, and age issues unless “forced with it, you know, like I am in these classes” referring to her women and gender studies courses. She explained that specific issues like “shootings, the killing of people, or the not being able to get married because you’re gay” are what is necessary to get people talking and engaged in making change. Rachel described being “grateful” for the experiences she had in her classes that compelled her to challenge societal norms and consider her own Whiteness. I found Rachel’s answers to be refreshingly honest because while she seemed very interested in talking to me at length about my study questions, she admitted having a conversation about race did not come naturally to her. Rachel said her college courses helped her understand and talk about issues of inequality—particularly race and gender.

Faith, another non-traditional student in my study, echoed the idea that Whites need to be pressed to discuss race. Faith, like Rachel, was one of the students in this study who had a clearer view of White privilege and racial inequality. Nevertheless, she admitted she, too, needed prompting at times to consider her race. She said, “I don’t even think about being White until you focus a conversation like this where you are talking about privilege or what your

background is...” Despite the many examples of curiosity and genuine interest in exploring race I saw across both of Faith’s interviews, she also admitted she needed an external trigger to think about being White, like Rachel.

Although earlier April said she never talked with other White students about their race, she then relayed an exchange she had with another White student before her multiculturalism class. Her classmate said, “I hope this isn’t a, like, ‘Blame-Everything-on-the-White-people’ kind of class.” April said she and her White classmate were frustrated in this particular course because although they wanted to work to eliminate racism, they felt unfairly associated with White persons who were actively being racist. She said,

I think we are all, White people are all aware of, we are aware of these things, but we don’t ... discuss them ... or, we don’t discuss them until we are forced to discuss them, I guess. Or put in the situation that would enable us to discuss them.

Like Rachel, April used the phrase “forced to”. At several points during her interviews, April talked about not feeling personally responsible for the racist actions of White persons in the United States due to her own ancestors being immigrants. She thought most other White college students felt the same way and might avoid talking about race because they would have judgments placed on them that did not reflect “the views or behaviors” of their own families. Although each of these three women willingly offered to meet with me to discuss their experience as White college students, they acknowledged sometimes even they needed to be “forced” to talk about race and felt most other White students are reluctant to converse about race as well.

Friends and family members. Social circles and family members were mentioned as barriers that prevent White students from openly and comfortably discussing race. Rachel told

me about an instance where persons in her social network called her racist after she questioned the images and messages contained in a political cartoon. Of the drawing, Rachel said, “I noticed that the man on the left was a bald man who looked brown in color, who had saggy pants on, a gold chain, and a gold belt. And the guy on the right looked like Bill Gates.” The cartoonist criticized the amount of money the man on the left spent on his clothing, suggesting the White man spent much less on his attire but was “rich” in worldly terms. Rachel’s friends accused her of being racist because she pointed out the troublesome racial stereotypes depicted in the image and said the cartoon was negatively portraying persons of Color. She said,

And I was like, “No, I think that I’m looking at it from different perspectives as opposed to just how much money someone spends. I’m looking at it from different angles.” And I was, I was almost ... you know defensive about it because, I really don’t think I’m racist in the, the negative term that people associate it with. I’m just being more aware. And, I think ... you know, I didn’t really get into it online, but, anyway, that happened, like, two days ago, and ... I probably would never have thought that before these last couple years.

Rachel’s story is worthy of note because it suggests White college students who do question dominant stereotypes encounter scrutiny and ridicule from friends who may not be taking the same courses or experiencing the same insights. This fear of negative peer reaction may prevent White students from speaking up in the future about racism. Pressure and criticism may also come from close family members, as shown in the next section.

Two students in my study described difficulties they had in discussing race with close family members. Their stories highlighted the challenges White college students faced as their own racial consciousness developed through campus experiences, but they lived with or were in

relationships with persons who were not as advanced in their development. John, a 21-year-old student at the time of this study, lived at home with his parents. He said his relationship with and knowledge of race was “more complicated” during college and as he became more aware of the racial tension in the world. Of this, he said,

...it bugs me, stuff like that, both ways, all ways, and I think I've gotten partially from like family influence but I've gotten more uncomfortable talking about serious race issues, race issues cuz any affect that my family has on me I try not to let it, sometimes it may, my thoughts but like, I try not to *act* on it at all.

In a fashion similar to his quote above, John described several childhood memories of his father making racist remarks. When he talked about these recollections, he stuttered and was hard to understand. John's responses also showed he contemplated how to respond in a more healthy and authentic way to issues of racism than how he was taught to as a child. When I asked him how he dealt with these feelings of conflict, he described the process of how he handled racist comments made by his father and other relatives currently. He said,

And when it does come up, I try, just, you know, be quiet and let them have their piece. It's not worth fighting over anything with that, yeah, I just uh, yeah, like I said it doesn't come up too much. And when it does, I just hang back, let them speak, and then, it'll move on in a minute. And, I just, just, it feels a bit awkward sometimes, yeah, but I just try not to get involved in that discussion. And sometimes I'll voice like, like, “Really? Come on” and stuff like that.

At this point in his life, John did not feel able to confront remarks made by his father, and he described not wanting to provoke the hard feelings he thought this interruption would cause. John's struggle during our interactions showed he was not satisfied with his current way of

responding to racism.

Macy also described feeling powerless to oppose the remarks of her husband, who she depicted as, “extremely ... racist, bigoted ... redneck.” She reflected on statements she made earlier in our interview about how college classes provided her with a growing awareness of oppression. However, she also admitted she is not always able to act accordingly due to constraints within her relationship with her husband. She said, “I do, I have the confidence to say something to him but I know it’s not going to change, so I save my breath (laugh). Does that make sense?” Macy looked slightly embarrassed as she talked about her decision not to challenge her husband’s behavior but explained she was in a situation that seemed formidable. She said, “I’m not going to change the way he thinks, the way he feels, um ... so I just look at it as that’s his opinion (laugh) ...” When I pointed out that earlier in our meeting, Macy was passionate and emotional in her response to being raised by a racist father, she explained her current college life and her home life were very divided. She said, “...it is like a split life. You know, and I shut one off when I got to the other one sometimes. Um, but my girls, I think are, I think are, I’m getting at least some of it through to my kids, so ...” Macy explained she talked with her daughters about issues of race, often when their father was not nearby. She did note one of her daughters was dating a boy who is “half Black and half Mexican” and her husband made an exception to his narrow thinking because he did not want to jeopardize his relationship with his daughter. My conversations with Macy, John, and Rachel caused me to wonder how colleges and universities can better equip White students with tools to help them challenge oppression and interrupt racism when living with or surrounded by intolerant family members and/or friends.

Power Differentials. When I asked students why it was so hard for Whites to talk about race, several participants alluded to a power differential between themselves and persons who

were male, older, faculty members, or persons of Color. My interviewees reported this perceived lack of authority on their own part made them withhold their opinions, become silent, and disengage from conversations. This subsection will examine these barriers that interviewees said prevented them from feeling able to talk about race.

Kimberly described trying to address her White, male, engineering counterparts when they wrongly assumed they could best solve problems for a plant in Mexico without hearing from the technicians on site. She said, “it seemed like I was getting a lot of pushback” which she felt this was due to her age, gender, and lack of experience. Even though she knew her approach would have solved the problem faster, Kimberly said she relented to the older, White, male perspective of her coworkers due to her status as an intern and the fact that she was a younger woman. She was not in a position of power in her estimation and this caused her to step back.

Several students said age was a barrier in addressing racism, particularly when persons were older than them. John, who felt he could not oppose his father’s racist remarks, said age might have prevented him from speaking up. When I asked John if he might have responded differently to racist remarks made by someone his own age, he said, “If they’re older, like, I think I mentioned before, they’re probably set in their ways. So, you’re probably not going to sway them.” Age and life experience presented an obstacle to John in being able to talk about race. April also talked specifically about age being a barrier to handling a conflict she had in one of her classes. When an older, African American female student made a negative remark in front of a class about April and her bi-racial boyfriend, April said she was in “complete shock” that the comment was not addressed by the professor or her classmates. No one came to April’s aid in the class. When I asked if she talked to the woman who made the remark, April said,

I don’t want to talk about something that I don’t think it’s going to be worth talking

about. Like I don't think, she's 60 something years old. Her opinions are not gonna change. So, I'm not gonna bother discussing something with somebody who ... I don't have respect for and I don't think has respect for me. But it's difficult.

April said instead, she called her boyfriend, who was her own age, after the class to talk about the incident. She talked later about not wanting to participate in the class any longer due to feeling she was powerless to influence the opinions of her classmate and because her professor failed to address or remedy the situation.

Students also discussed how they felt faculty members exerted power, which restricted students' ability to have conversations about race. Monroe provided examples of feeling powerless to challenge a faculty member on an assumption about socioeconomic status. Monroe chose to be silent in her sociology class because she did not want to be exposed in front of her more affluent classmates. She said,

The instructor said, they were talking about the Salvation Army and how we could go and help, help people that can't fill out applications and don't have the intelligence we have, and I'm thinking to myself, "I go to the Salvation Army because, I'm a single mom and I need that turkey!" And, you know, and I thought, I don't know if she got it really, do you know what I mean?

Monroe said she did not say anything to challenge this comment during class because she did not want the White students in class or her professor to know this information about her. Later, Monroe told me the same professor wrote, "Disappointed. Did you even read?!?" on one of Monroe's first assignments on which she expended an incredible amount of effort. Monroe talked about feeling vulnerable as a non-traditional student and how this made her less likely to participate in class. She said,

So, as an adult learner coming into it, it's very very hard! It's almost like a newborn starting over. To me, I think. So she assumed, I was just the lazy, thinking I was gonna get cuz I could tell just by the way she talked to me. When I'd raise my hand, she'd never call me.

Monroe was close in age to the professor but talked about being intimidated by the power a faculty member held over her as a student. Monroe said she felt powerless due to her socioeconomic status, which she perceived to be far below that of her classmates. Both of these factors caused Monroe to refrain from participating in her sociology class discussions, many of which were about racial issues.

April talked about being silent in her multiculturalism class and a previous class at another institution because she felt intimidated by her professors who were persons of Color. April said in her class at Midwestern University, the female professor whom she identified as Caribbean, often disagreed with White students in class. April said she often sat with another White student in this class who she described as "very quiet in class, she doesn't participate, she doesn't talk. Um, but she did in the other classes we had. So, I can only assume it's because she's uncomfortable." After the incident April described about an older African American woman making a negative comment to her, April said she felt "disrespected... like it doesn't matter what I say, my opinion will be diminished in that class." In her first interview, April provided enthusiastic descriptions about learning of different cultures from her father. Then, in her second interview, April's tone was markedly different, which she attributed to her negative experiences in the multiculturalism class. She said, "And I just feel like there's no, level of respect between the teacher, er, the professor and the students, and the students of different races."

April also told me about her perceptions of a professor at another institution. She described him as, “older, 70s, African American, fought in the Civil Rights Movement.” April described feeling powerless in that class because being White marked her as “living in a bubble” and unaware of the racism in society. She said of her male professor,

He was just ... very, he just diminished you. And you walked out of there feeling like ... it doesn't matter how I feel because I'm White. And it's ... it's frustrating ... because that's one of the reasons I feel like ... people who are not African American don't talk. Because it doesn't matter what we say, we are wrong. And ... it's frustrating.

April compared these negative experiences of discussing race in the college classroom with a positive one she had in high school as part of an accelerated English class. Students were allowed to bring in topics of their choosing with almost no topic barred, and the teacher led stimulating discussion about controversial issues. The teacher made deliberate efforts to facilitate a respectful dialogue, April noted, by having students sit in a circle, controlling the flow of conversation to one person at a time, creating a safe space, using facts as the basis for discussion, and keeping conversations confidential and restricted to those in the classroom. April made sure I understood she wanted to discuss race in her college classes but explained her frustration stemmed from the educational spaces in two institutions she attended not being set up by professors to promote respectful dialogues for White people.

Several students told me that at times, they engaged less in class conversations about race when persons of Color were present in the classroom. During my first interview with Abigail, I asked her to tell me about any experiences she had in college that caused her to think about being White. She talked of a recent composition class discussion, where the conversation focused on the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager, by a White police officer.

Abigail felt some of her Black classmates were saying things she knew were untrue based on news articles she read. Abigail noted she withheld her opinions about the case during the discussion because she feared she would be seen as racist by her Black classmates. During the second interview, I asked her why she did not share the information she had about the case while in class. She said,

Cuz I knew that, in the real case, um [whispered] Mike Brown, I believe ... I'm not sure of the exact situation. But, that the cop, was defending himself for the most part, because, um, he was positioned where he was about to grab his gun. Just from, um, different reports that I heard. And I don't think people actually knew that? I think they were just listening to what they heard in the media. And I didn't want to bring it up though, because I didn't want to cause an issue in the class.

I noted in the quotation above that Abigail whispered before mentioning the name of the teenager involved in this controversial case, and this was interesting because our interview was in a place in the library away from any other persons. I also observed it was clear Abigail felt her news sources were more reliable than those her African American classmates consulted. During our second interview, I shared this quote with Abigail and asked her why she felt she could not speak up in class, after she described Midwestern University as a place where people were really on a "level playing field." She replied, "It was more that I just, I didn't feel like stirring up um, drama or, or any controversy."

In summary, this first section of Chapter Six provided evidence that the participants in this study demonstrated an interest in discussing their own race and were willing to do so. They felt Midwestern University was a place that promoted inclusiveness and diversity. The responses of Rachel, Abigail, April, and Wayne were examined closely to better understand why some

students were interested in talking about race. Several factors were provided that interviewees said prevented or inhibited them from talking about race in the past including needing an impetus to do so, friends and family members, and perceived imbalances in power dynamics. The next section examines students' interest in talking about racism, its causes, their experiences with it, and what they felt would happen in the future.

Participants' Awareness of Racism

Although none of the questions I asked as part of my interview protocol mentioned the term "racism" participants in my study talked about it. In this section, I share how students defined racism and what they thought were causes of discrimination in the United States. Participants' reactions to my question about living in the most segregated urban area in America are provided. Lastly, I examined students' ideas about the future of racism. In many cases, participants said things that also showed me how unaware they were of White privilege and the ways racism shaped their lives. These instances of "double standards" are addressed in Chapter Seven of this document.

Definitions of Racism

Without prompting, several students in this study talked about racism when asked about the nature of their experiences as White college students. In these cases, I asked follow-up questions to understand their perceptions of racism and how they came to learn about it. Some students provided specific definitions and examples. Rachel said she felt race should not be used to classify people in any way. She said,

Because I feel that it was originally constructed to ... for the people in power to put in place the people that they thought were inferior to them. So, White man, um you know, used these classifications, you know, whether it be Black or African American or

whatnot, basically to, put people into that category so that they knew their place in society.

Rachel said she learned about racism in college at the age of 30. She said her current definition was the result of what she learned in her women and gender studies courses. Abigail, a traditional age student, responded similarly to Rachel, as she described race as a “social construct” that is “used against people”. Marianne, a political science major, talked about her work with a non-profit dedicated to eliminating inequality. She said she learned about racial discrimination at the non-profit and in college. She talked about racism several times across her interviews and provided this definition,

Structural racism is racism that is in organizations and government and it is uh, been around for, it has been around for a long time and it is worked into these organizations, into the government, into the education system and, it’s, it has created a, like a dominant cultural narrative...

Although she learned about racism in her courses in college, Marianne said she did not see examples of racism on campus at Midwestern University. The majority of students in this study agreed with Marianne and identified Midwestern as an inclusive place where diversity was respected. Four students mentioned that they learned about racism in school prior to coming to college. When I asked what students remembered hearing or learning about racism while in middle and high school, the most frequent responses were distant historical events related to the Civil War, slavery in the United States, internment camps, and the Civil Rights Movement.

A few students acknowledged the existence of racism, but said it was not as pressing in the modern day as it was years ago. Wayne said, “Yeah ... I’m sure there’s still racism but uh ... not like there was and uh ... I think more kids today probably believe the way I believed in the

60s.” Wayne, a non-traditional student, described being one of few Whites in the 1960s who fought for racial equality during the Civil Rights era, and explained that since many White people seemed to be aware of racism today, it was not as big of a societal issue as it was over 50 years ago. Rachel said gender and sexual orientation were “more pronounced issues” than race currently. Although she acknowledged race is still a part of the “hierarchy” by which society is judged, Rachel felt that nationally, gender identity and sexual orientation were being discussed more among contemporary college students and the media. John, a traditional age student, felt similar to Rachel. He said,

I think uh, people my age nowadays they’re moving—I don’t want to say moving, it’s almost trendier to move onto different social issues. Like race is so last decade, last *century* even ... It’s like, there’s a lot of different other issues nowadays and racism, that’s been an issue for a while ... there’s a lot more new ones, you know with like, uh gender identity and stuff like that that’s more, I don’t want to say hotter, but something like that.

John explained he felt racism was a problem for older generations who experienced specific historical incidents and were not willing to move on to more topical matters. This idea is discussed more fully in the next section related to the reasons participants gave to explain why racism still exists.

Causes of Racism

Participants named several causes of racism, including people, the media, and corporations. Racist people were identified as an important factor contributing to the ongoing existence of racism today. Marianne told several stories of White people she worked with or family members who acted and spoke in closed-minded ways. She said, “...like modern racism,

uh, people, say like silly things and they don't realize what it sounds like and they think these things and it doesn't, they don't, realize, that, it's, racist." She explained racism stemmed from how people were raised with past generations of grandparents passing racist ideas down to the current generation of parents. Her answer seemed to suggest current traditional age college students were more enlightened on the topic of race and did not display such profoundly racist views as previous age groups. John also talked about how older family members affected the staying power of racism for him personally and for society at large. He said,

Yeah, like if you could remove that influence, just for like a race issue, I think any problems that exist, I think a lot of them would go down ... I do think that the past generational influence on people today, younger people today, is a big part of whatever issues are still around with that, I'd say.

Several students tied the idea of racist people to the media, which they believed to be a major contributor to ongoing racial inequality. April said "the people with the loudest voices who are White in the media" often were racially intolerant. She particularly noted the "stigmas that White media has put on the Arabic population" in recent years. Faith observed a distinct difference between the sense of collaboration she saw daily at Midwestern University across race and the negative messages portrayed by the media on television, radio, and internet. She said, "...the news, I think, still targets stories or sensationalizes stories that are all about dividing." Marianne spoke about how businesses and the 1% controlled much of the marketing and commercials in the media and reinforced "racism, gender roles, [and] poverty". She said, "...Corporate America and advertisers, and just various organizations kind of uh, uh, create or keep that, you know, inequality and racism going." The overall sense I gleaned from participants was they saw both individual, ignorant people and large societal forces as responsible for racism

today. Students also seemed to think the roots of racism and the current racial divide in the Detroit area originated deep in the past and although felt today, were not something they could particularly affect or change through their individual actions.

Reactions to Living in Metropolitan Detroit

Near the end of the first interview, I asked students if they were aware that Midwestern University as located in an area of note as the most segregated in the United States. I explained that the City of Detroit was named as the urban area with the most African American residents, the City of Dearborn had the one of the highest concentrations in the nation of Arab American residents, and the surrounding suburbs were populated overwhelmingly with White residents. Participants' responses to my question about their experience in this unique area were varied but fell into several general categories: aware, not aware/not surprised, and not aware and surprised. In this section, interviewees responses are examined.

Only three students said they knew or heard about the statistics and unflattering national distinction related to the areas near and around Midwestern University as being the most racially/ethnically separated community. Macy called it "an apartheid situation" and said "yet on campus, it's like a bubble (laugh). A happy bubble". She mentioned multiple times during both interviews that students from different cultures seemed to get along well and described the institution as "unique" and "inclusive". Wayne provided a different perspective when he talked about being aware of the divide. He said property values one half mile into the predominantly White suburban City of Livonia "double" compared to values in the bordering Detroit, which is predominantly Black. He chose to live in Livonia, which he noted was known as the Whitest city in the nation. Rachel also talked about housing, mentioning that her traditionally White historic neighborhood near Detroit was recently in an uproar due to a thrift store moving in

nearby. She said,

A lot of the residents ... did not want to see that go in for fear of what it would bring, meaning the low income people or ... up-to-no-good people because that's what's associated with the low income people. And to me, I think they [neighbors] also [say] that means Black people...

She provided examples of recent news stories about the suburbs not wanting to share in Detroit's water system because "they don't want to take on what they think will come with that land, meaning the people and that culture". Rachel moved to Metropolitan Detroit in 1998 and said fear of racial and ethnic conflict was a common point of conversation among her neighbors.

An interesting pattern was seen in the responses of four students to my question about the division of Detroit, Dearborn, and the suburbs. Although each participant responded in a slightly different way, the general answer was they knew Detroit had a majority African American population, the suburbs were predominantly White, and Dearborn had one of the highest concentrations of Arab Americans in the United States. However, they did not consider the bigger picture that the area was "segregated" or notable because it was so separated. Kimberly's reaction summed up well the pattern I observed. She said, "...it's kind of funny because, when you think about it, it's not that surprising but I just never put two and two together." After first saying she was not aware, Faith quickly changed her mind and said something similar to Kimberly, "Well, you know, I guess I did know that. But, I guess I never really stopped and heard somebody tell me that, that, 'Yes, that's factual'". Abigail's answer was conflicting as well. She said, "Yep. I definitely knew that about Detroit, and I knew that about Dearborn ... but I didn't realize how dense it was ... I didn't realize that it was that segregated though, like all three of those." Abigail named the cities noted as having large populations of persons of Color

but did not think about the suburbs where she lived. After clarifying that I used the word “segregated” when asking my question, John’s answer also fit this pattern of knowing the housing configurations in the Detroit area but not seeing the whole area as disconnected. He said,

Most ... yeah, I think individually, I might have knew [sic] all those facts. But I don’t know if I ever put it together, if I ever knew we were number one ... Yeah, once you put it together, it doesn’t really surprise me but, uh ... yeah I guess, you know, cuz it’s not forced segregation, not like in the past. It’s just people of a like, background and such typically group together and this is just, I don’t know, on a larger scale. Uh, I don’t, yeah, no negative or positive reactions really ... just it’s an interesting fact.

John’s answer uncovered part of what may have made this question troubling for other students to answer. He struggled with the word “segregated” and suggested it was a word used to describe a time long ago in United States history. He seemed to feel the reason for the current residential patterns in and around Detroit today were merely the preference of people to live in similar groups. This same idea was echoed by Abigail when I asked how she thought the Metropolitan Detroit area became so racially divided and why it stayed that way. She said, “...people are more comfortable with their own race so they, they tend to, you know, stick together for the most part.” When talking about groups on campus at Midwestern, I also noticed both Macy and Rachel said something similar, with Macy believing it was a “safety kind of thing” for Chinese engineering students to sit together. Rachel said in the cafeteria, she noticed people tended to be “*alike* in their groups.” For the most part, students in my study reported that, again, larger forces outside of their control were at work that caused persons of Color to willingly group together.

Faith's response to this question was worth examining more closely due to her background and the observations she made as a result. As someone who did not grow up in Michigan, Faith moved to a suburb near Detroit in 1999. Across her interviews, she described the process of how she came to understand the fragmentation of the Detroit area. She said,

I guess I started noticing then, too, when, I mean, on the surface that you see it's race. Then, a step lower, you notice that it's by location and especially relating to how socioeconomically people are kind of divided here. So, you know, I've no-you take a ride on Woodward, and you go from, the ghetto to mansions (laugh). And I thought that that was very interesting because I thought, "Wow! Here are we in the, you know, the twenty-first century and this is still very, very divided.

Faith noted when she completed the emailed questionnaire I sent prior to our interview, she realized "how separate I view race issues as opposed to socioeconomic issues." However, she said that as she thought further, she felt the issues "have roots ultimately in race". Lack of public transit and the "manufacturing bubble" of the automotive industry were also factors Faith said perpetuated the divide in Metropolitan Detroit. Faith's moving to the Detroit area from a largely rural area when she was in her early 20s may have provided her with an outsider perspective. This unique viewpoint enabled her to tie the racial divide around Detroit to issues of socioeconomics and consider the issue at a deeper level than did other students in my study.

The Future

On the subject of the future of racism in the United States, students were split. Half of the participants envisioned a future with less racial division and half were convinced that the future is bleak. Abigail focused on the progress made over the most recent five decades as her reasoning for a positive outlook. She said, "I think everything is getting better ...slowly but

surely ... If you even think about the last 50 years, it, the steps that have been taken. It's pretty remarkable actually." She talked about events on campus to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's birthday as proof that advancements had been made. Kimberly agreed reducing racism has been a "slow process". She noted if a person from her grandparent's generation were asked the same question years ago, they would have responded, "Well, it will be a non-issue [in 2015]". Kimberly reacted, "And we're not there yet, and we ... we don't seem to be as close as we need to be. Which is a little scary, actually." Faith spoke of seeing more people involved in interracial relationships both on campus and on television. She noted with optimism that as parents raise children from these partnerships, they may find themselves attending a "cousin's bar mitzvah" one day and then having "sushi with grandma" the next day, which will result in people feeling more comfortable across difference. She predicted having more diverse experiences would mean, "That you don't have to let one thing define who you are or define your interactions, um, I'm, I'm hoping that people will ...will continue to be more collaborative". Although each admitted the task was daunting, students in this first group felt overall, racial relations would continue to improve beyond 2015.

Not all students in my study agreed that racial equality would be achieved in the United States. April referenced the recent demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri and related events in other cities across the country as evidence of what she saw as a future that involved "civil war, civil unrest". She said, "I don't think ... in history things have ever come ... without a fight". She added that she and her boyfriend had talked recently about moving out of the United States because of their dismal outlook on race relations. Regarding racism, she said, "Um ... it's essentially been here since before we were here. Since before the country, I guess, was here. And I don't think it's like this everywhere else. I don't think the race relationships are as ...

negative in other countries.” She mentioned fearing for the safety of her bi-racial boyfriend as well. Rachel agreed racism was going to continue indefinitely into the future. She said, “I think it’s, it’s always gonna be an issue as long as there are people in power.” She talked about being angry about Whites using their power and position in society to the detriment of others. Referencing recent police brutality cases against African American males, she said, “...I feel like on a smaller scale it is ... going backwards. We are repeating events of the past when segregation, we were trying to eliminate it.”

Monroe’s perspective differed from Rachel but was similar to answers provided previously in the interviews of April and Wayne. Monroe said, “Nothing can ever be equal until ... (long pause) until people of Color ... and creed and race realize that not everything was the White people’s fault.” She talked about learning in a history class about the origins of slavery. “They didn’t come from us [White people]. They came from Black people. White people just realized that you could make money and things like that. Which is terrible, really terrible.” However, Monroe explained when one race felt another had to “owe” them something, then racial equality would not be possible.

Listen without challenging participants’ responses in my study was difficult, but carefully documenting what I did hear students say enabled me to understand their views about racism, race, and privilege. Often, I disagreed with students’ answers and wanted to educate them but gave no outward sign as I felt an obligation to appear unbiased as a researcher. Giving White students an opportunity to talk about their perceptions of race in my study in a non-judgmental environment led to direct observation that participants wanted to talk about race but had limited capabilities, perceived opportunities, and experience doing so.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Six I shared that overall, students in my study displayed a desire to discuss race. I highlighted characteristics that some students felt made Midwestern University a safe place to discuss race, provided in-depth responses from several students who talked openly about the experience of being White. Reasons students disengaged or avoided talking about race on campus and at home were also provided. An analysis of participants' awareness of racism, how they defined it, and what they believed caused racism to continue in the United States was presented. Students' responses to living in the most segregated urban area in the nation were offered, and contradictions in their answers were identified. Students' views on the future of racism were shared, with half feeling optimistic and half pessimistic. Chapter Seven moves to discussing the significance of the study results, the implications of the study, and recommendations for practice, policy, and research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to learn how contemporary White college students interpreted their own race. In Chapters Five and Six, the findings of this study were presented in response to the research questions posed:

1. What is the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race?
2. For White college students who can “see” their own race, what events led to this occurrence? (Chesler et al., 2003).

The following sub-questions were used in conjunction with the questions above:

- What does it mean to White college students to be White? (e.g., How do White college students describe their experiences of race?)
- What do these students believe has shaped their ideas about race? (e.g., What types of educational and other experiences affect how White college students view their own race?)

The research that informed this study occurred at Midwestern University, specifically chosen for its location in the most segregated urban area in the United States. Themes explored in Chapter Five showed how college students at Midwestern University described what it meant to be White and the events and experiences that led them to perceive their race. In Chapter Six, evidence was provided showing participants were eager to talk about race for this study but felt limited in their abilities to do so in their real lives. The reasons and environments that both encouraged and restricted conversations about race for White students were highlighted. Students also talked about the past, present status, and future of racism and evidence of their narrow understanding of the prevalence and impact of discrimination was provided.

The first half of Chapter Seven contains an analysis of participants’ responses and

connections to literature and research in the fields of college student development theory and whiteness studies. This first part is organized into the following sections mirroring the evidence provided in Chapters Five and Six: Being White, Seeing White, Talking About Race, and Seeing Racism. Then, the limitations of this study are presented. Implications for practice and policy are considered. Lastly, areas for future research are suggested.

Being White

The first research question focused on discovering how participants in my study defined their experience as White college students. I asked students directly to describe what being a White person meant to them. Previous researchers found White college students had difficulty explaining their racial experience (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Helms, 2008; McKinney, 2005) and my participants struggled as well. These struggles are presented first in this section as disfluencies in speech and “semantic moves” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000); White as invisible and ordinary; and efforts to distance themselves from being White. Then, the advantages and disadvantages of being White are examined further within the subsection of Being White.

Disfluencies in Speech and Semantic Moves

Frequently throughout the interviews, students paused, stuttered, sighed, whispered, and at times grappled with their inability to express themselves when discussing race. Baldwin (1965) observed and commented about the “stammering” of White Americans when talking to African Americans. Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) made note of a White interviewee who was easy to understand throughout an interview, but “stuttered remarkably” when asked if he was attracted to a woman of another race. Participants in this study exhibited frequent speech disfluencies when asked to talk about any race, including their

own. I intentionally created exact transcripts so speech patterns of participants might be examined. The quotes included in Chapters Five and Six showed frequent pauses, stops, and starts while talking and evidence of participants having difficulty in responding to questions. While the scope of this study did not allow for a complete or thorough structural or discourse analysis, I did examine the frequency, timing, order, and phrasing of many significant quotes to make meaning of findings and themes. This analysis is presented next.

The work of Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) and Bonilla-Silva (2006) was particularly important to my study because these researchers compared survey data and interview data and examined the attitudes of White college students related to “fundamental racial issues—affirmative action, interracial marriage, and the significance of discrimination” (2000, p. 75). Their research identified that White persons commonly used unique speech patterns as a way to escape appearing prejudiced in today’s age of colorblindness. Through “discursive maneuvers or semantic moves,” White college students used phrases such as “I am not a racist, but ...” as qualifiers right before saying something of a racist nature (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000, p. 51). I observed participants using similar phrases during interviews for this study. Marianne acknowledged, “..this is bad...” before saying that when she traveled to the City of Detroit, she typically thought about being White. On three occasions in Rachel’s first interview, she used the phrases, “I hate to say this, but ...” or “I feel so sorry for saying this...” before talking about African Americans. Monroe’s response also contained a variation of discursive maneuvers using the word “racial” when she talked about African American persons. Twice she said something similar to, “...it sounds really racial, but I’m actually not” and once she said “he’s not racial” when talking about her son feeling he was discriminated against by an African American coach. She also used the phrase, “I know it sounds terrible, but I don’t mean it like that at all” as well.

Use of these types of disclaimers showed students were aware on some level that they were about to say something that may have been perceived negatively by the listener, and they wanted to make sure they did not appear racist. When I examined how each of these students scored on the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale – Revised (ORAS-R) assessment (Vandiver & Leach, 2005), both Rachel and Marianne scored high on the bi-polar scale of Dominative/Integrative, showing evidence of racial acceptance, while Monroe’s score was more in the middle part of the sample. Monroe scored much higher than Rachel and Marianne in the Conflictive type, which suggested Monroe felt persons of Color benefitted more in modern society. I was surprised to find the scores were so different when each of the three students used similar semantic maneuvers. Participants might have used semantic maneuvers regardless of their racial attitudes or levels of consciousness.

Some interviewees in my study responded in ways that revealed uncertainty and a lack of confidence in their answers. In the first interview with April, she used the phrase “I don’t know” over 25 times, displaying a sense of doubt in her responses. While Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) stated the use of the phrase, “I don’t know” was in line with a maneuver they called “topic avoidance by claiming ignorance and ambivalence,” April’s response did not seem to be deliberately evasive. Rather, she was unsure and may have been demonstrating what was described as Dissonant by LaFleur, Rowe, and Leach (2002) in the reconceptualized version of the White racial consciousness model of Rowe, Behrens, and Atkinson (1994). Various times in Macy’s answers, she asked me some variation of the question “Does that make sense?” Macy’s responses also were consistent with the Dissonant marker, suggesting she was not firm in her answers. When considering the totality of what I learned about April and Macy during their interviews, both women said they experienced significant and violent events related to race over

the course of their lives and were trying to make meaning of those hurtful experiences in light of what they were learning in college. Both women selected majors and careers related to promoting racial equality and were committed to that idea but were struggling with current experiences and their family history in light of what they recently learned.

I noted that overall, the responses of Monroe, John, and Wayne across both interviews were different than those of April and Macy. Monroe, John, and Wayne seemed to seek approval or consensus from me for statements they each made by asking “you know” over and over. Monroe and John used this phrase over 20 times each across their interviews, and Wayne said “you know” over 50 times in the first interview. For Monroe and Wayne, this phrase was used consistently when they talked about experiences with African Americans, and John used it whenever talking about race. Examining the bulk of the interviews and scores on the ORAS-R indicated that the responses of Monroe, John, and Wayne were more in line with what Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) deemed as attempts to avoid sounding racist. These three students scored highest in my sample on the Conflictive attitude scale, suggesting that they felt society unfairly benefits persons of Color.

Additionally, the five students cited in this section (April, Macy, Monroe, Wayne, and John) all identified themselves as either working class or lower middle class. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) called for more research to be done to study if social class relates to Whites’ usage of semantic moves when talking about race. My findings, although limited and not generalizable to a larger population, coincide with the call for more study of the idea that persons of varying socioeconomic status might use semantic moves differently and with various intents.

Multiple times throughout the study, I noted that participants whispered or dropped their voice while talking. Picca and Feagin (2007) conducted research in which White students wrote

about their daily lives in racial event journals. They observed White students noted whispering in their journals when talking about Black students in all White groups. Quotes from Monroe and Abigail in Chapter Five and Six of this document provided examples of whispers. In both cases, the interviewees dropped their voices when referring to African American men. There were other notable times when students in this study whispered, such as when April lowered her voice twice, on one occasion immediately before mentioning “White girls” and once before saying that her boyfriend was “African American.” While the interviews with Monroe, Abigail, and April took place in a library on campus, there were no persons seated within 12 feet of our table. Even though no one could hear our conversation, these students were conditioned to whisper when talking about race. Even more surprising was that when I spoke to Rachel in her own home, she whispered when telling me about an experience she had. She said, “I was in a group training session a week or two ago and a man stood up, he was (whisper) Black...” Despite the fact that Rachel and I were the only persons in her own home, she still whispered before stating the race of a person. In each case, participants seemed unaware of the fact that they lowered their voices when talking about race and specifically, when talking about Black men.

Findings in my research supported the existing literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Helms, 2008; McKinney, 2005) that White students have deep awkwardness and discomfort when talking about race. Students whispered, sought affirmation for responses, used discursive maneuvers, and exhibited many disfluencies in responses. The significance of these struggles is that each contributes to the overall problem of White students being uncomfortable and avoiding talking about race. While I experienced participants being interested and even enthusiastic to meet with me and discuss issues of race, the difficulties I

observed were substantial and may have prevented students from engaging in conversations related to race when in larger groups and when persons of Color are present. Since White students represent the majority of students on campus, this could suggest that discussions of race are restricted or avoided at a time when campuses are more diverse than they have ever been. If White students are hesitant and show reluctance to talk openly and freely about race in private and semi-private spaces with other White persons, they may behave similarly in classroom and campus spaces at colleges and universities. And more importantly, White students may not be able to engage in the integral and often difficult conversations about race beyond campus in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

While participants struggled to express themselves when talking about race, I also noted participants in my study were willing to fumble through. They wanted to discuss their experiences and observations and wanted to ask questions and my opinion as well. Although they may not have been able to articulate themselves fluently or confidently, the participants were interested in having conversations with me and were willing to remain in the conversation during the challenging parts. This study suggests it may be possible to identify and engage White college students in similar dialogues about their race. Postsecondary institutions must do more to encourage White students to participate actively in discussions about race and privilege.

White as Invisible and Ordinary

Although the previous section contained many examples of participants altering their speech when talking about race, some of these may have been unconscious reactions to being raised in a predominantly White society in which it is taboo to discuss race. The intricacies and patterns of speech alteration visible to me as the researcher were due to reading the literature, knowing what to look for, and spending a significant amount of time reviewing participant

transcripts. Conversely, my participants did not appear to be aware of their actions or behaviors while the interviews took place.

However, when asked directly to describe the White experience, participants were conscious and forthright when they talked about their race as being intangible, boring, and blank. Half of the students in this study said they did not actively or frequently reflect on or notice their race. Many scholars and researchers have written about Whites' inability to see their own race due to its prominence in society (Andersen, 2003; Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003; Helms, 2008; McKinney, 2005). The responses of participants in my study were consistent with what Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) highlighted when they mentioned a White college student who said White culture did not exist. In Chapter Five of this document, I included a quote from Faith who said Whites are "a dime a dozen" and "boring". Faith's description of being White was reminiscent of Cathy Thomas's now well-known phrase "Heinz 57 American," a quote from the research of Frankenberg (1993) that came to symbolize the sense that Whites felt ordinary and generic in American society. Both Frankenberg and Doane (2003) cautioned when White people do not see their race, they assume their experience is the American experience—which prevents them from perceiving and dismantling privilege, racism, and oppression. Harper and Hurtado (2007) noted the inability of White students to perceive the severe inequities experienced by students of Color on campuses. The majority of college and universities have mission statements and educational outcomes related to instilling in students an awareness and appreciation of diversity. Student affairs programs are dedicated to being supportive of and promoting growth for all students in a time where there is more diversity on college campuses and in American society than ever before. And yet, the existing literature and my findings indicate White students continue to be unaware of their race and the privileges associated with being White.

Efforts to Distance Themselves from Being White

None of the 10 White students I interviewed spoke in an outright positive manner or with pride about their race. Several participants provided answers that seemed like attempts to disassociate themselves with the term White and instead align with their relatives who immigrated to the United States or with the human race in general. Both of these responses can be found in the literature. Helms (2008) noted some White persons in her research identified with a specific ethnicity or nationality instead of their race. Hardiman (2001) posed the question, “Does a strong sense of ethnicity better equip Whites to participate constructively in a nonracist, equitable, multicultural society?” (p. 124). Gallagher (2003) suggested that claiming ethnic identity was used by White persons as a tactic to avoid racism by showing how White immigrants assimilated and that persons of Color lacked the work ethic and desire to do the same. The responses of April, Kimberly, and Macy in this study, while not completely aligned with these ideas, did contain some similar undertones. Marianne and Rachel referred to the idea that instead of identifying as White, they thought of themselves as “a person” or as “just another person”. What is troubling about these responses is that Marianne and Rachel indicated this association with personhood instead of race came from what they learned in courses at Midwestern University. Their responses were reminiscent of the writing of Dyer (2012) about the dangers to society when White people fail to acknowledge their privileged place in society and instead believe they speak for the good of the entire human race.

Identification with immigrant family members and the human race both seemed like efforts participants made to distance themselves from their race and racism, but I cannot say that these were malicious actions by participants. Instead, I observed April, Kimberly, Macy, Marianne, and Rachel each seemed to believe their responses were in line with what they had

either learned in college classes or from family members. None of these students saw themselves as reinforcing racism in society due to these views. Quite the opposite, students felt they were actively working on learning how to be change agents in their lives and future careers or carrying on family heritage. This finding was significant because it pointed to the need to help White students interrogate and interpret their evolving White identity while in college. Each of these students told me at some point during their interviews they were either currently working toward securing equal rights for those who are marginalized in society or hoped to do this work in their future careers. What can educators and practitioners do to show students like these participants that separating themselves from their racial privilege is actually contrary to their goals of working toward social justice?

Advantages and Disadvantages of Being White

In the previous section, I showed how students could not easily express their feelings about being White and tried to separate themselves from what they perceived as the stereotypical White experience of wealth and privilege. These themes were also evident when students identified the advantages and disadvantages related to being a White person in American society. Although participants in this study identified a few areas of racial privilege White persons had overall, the more significant and disturbing theme was participants felt strongly they did not personally benefit from these privileges or they in fact were at a disadvantage because of their race. While these ideas might seem to align easily with the previously cited literature that showed Whites had low levels of awareness and assumed all persons in society receive the same benefits, this answer is distressing for contemporary higher education educators and practitioners dedicated to teaching students about access, equality, and social justice. Considering the majority of students in my study said they planned to pursue careers in service to the public, the

magnitude of their lack of awareness is of concern. In this section, I examine students' responses in light of literature related to how White persons develop a sense of identity and their attitudes about race. Then, an analysis of participants' responses that White persons are overlooked for resources is provided.

Not personally experiencing the advantages of Whiteness. Although students named a number of ways White people are advantaged in modern society, some also said they did not experience those benefits personally. The response of Rachel in Chapter Five was particularly interesting to examine due to the conflicting messages within it. First, she stated being born White was not advantageous to her, and then she acknowledged being born Black would have been a disadvantage. In the same quote, she said she read statistics and knew White people had specific advantages in society, but she did not experience those benefits "personally" and yet still agreed that inequality existed even though she did not see evidence of it in her life. This confusing comment may be similar to what Bonilla-Silva (2006) called the "yes and no strategy" (p. 60). Bonilla-Silva observed White college students' efforts to avoid appearing racist by first agreeing with a statement, then disagreeing before finally saying something discriminatory. Rachel's answer was also similar to what McKinney observed in her study and called "fictions of whiteness" with White respondents who inaccurately "perceived themselves as victimized" (2005, p. 220-221).

Another way to examine Rachel's conflicting answer is to look through the lenses of identity development models and theories. In her stage model to explain White racial identity development, Helms (1993) described the pseudo-independence stage as the first in defining a nonracist White identity. Several of Rachel's answers seemed consistent with what Helms (2008) described as "'thinking' about racial issues rather than 'feeling' about them" (p. 62).

Rachel may have been experiencing conflict in understanding her racial identity as a result of thinking about her coursework. Within the population examined in this study, Rachel's score on the ORAS-R was one of the highest in the Integrative type, which suggested she was accepting and comfortable with racial difference and felt a moral duty to end racism (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002; Vandiver & Leach, 2005). At various times during her interviews, Rachel provided statements that supported these ideas and her score and at other times, she seemed squarely within the domain described as Dissonant, or uncertain about her level of commitment to racial acceptance or justice (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002). This fluctuation could be related to the new experiences and information that caused Rachel to "see" (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003) her own race and question her previous beliefs. Based on the limited amount of time spent with each participant and the fact that identity is fluid and constantly changing, the data collected for this study is at best, an incomplete rendering of students' beliefs and understanding of themselves. The ever-shifting nature of racial identity presents a vexing dilemma for those in colleges and universities tasked with planning courses and educational experiences for White students. More research is needed to help faculty and practitioners learn how to work with White students experiencing the dissonance necessary for identity development and students expressing views consistent with privilege, colorblindness, and racism. Checkpoints could be created within the college experience to cause White students to evaluate their own racial consciousness and development.

Whites think they are overlooked for resources. The majority of students in both this study and my pilot study talked about the idea that college admissions and/or scholarship awards were unfair processes for White students. There is much in the literature about affirmative action related to college admissions that should have prepared me to hear this from participants

(Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000; Chesler et al., 2003; Doane, 2003; Lipsitz, 2012; Tatum, 2007).

In Chapter Five, an extended quote from Abigail, a traditional aged student, suggests that at least some contemporary White students are still convinced affirmative action worked against them and they discussed it at length while in high school. John's quote about thinking he would have "gotten more financial compensation" if he "hadn't been a White male" also demonstrated the persistent myth and continued ignorance around who receives scholarship funding in higher education. Kantrowitz (2011) stated "merit-based grants tend to disproportionately select for Caucasian students." McKinney (2005) also wrote about the many misconceptions White college students held related to college admissions and scholarships, their unawareness of the prevalence of legacy preferences, and that White students named Black students when discussing feeling affirmative action was unfair (p. 159). Two participants in this study specifically mentioned finding many scholarships for African Americans and feeling there were none for them. Both of these participants were female, described themselves as financially in need from lower middle class backgrounds, and also expressed they felt "deserving" of scholarships.

Three of the non-traditional students in this study did not mention college admissions or scholarships but did talk about feeling they were overlooked for monetary resources. Macy's responses were particularly thought-provoking because of her inability to apply what she learned in her college classes to her life outside of Midwestern University—a theme that is examined again later in the document when discussing participants' ability to address racism with friends and family members. Despite talking about how much she enjoyed studying on a campus that was "so diverse" and "very inclusive" Macy then used stereotypical language consistent with welfare racism (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001) in her descriptions of being rejected for financial assistance and seeing Hispanic families using food assistance benefits at her job. She seemed

unaware that these reactions to her real-life experiences were in direct conflict with the messages of equality she told me were the core of what she learned in her courses in criminal justice, sociology, and women and gender studies.

Data regarding college admissions and scholarships are something colleges and universities track. Sharing general statistics and profiles about admissions and scholarships may help dispel the persistent myths that cause intelligent White college students to fall prey to fear-based pre-college gossip reported from participants who attended majority White high schools. However, once in college, sharing this information with students – particularly when White students remark how much they enjoy being at a diverse campus—is necessary. Without these types of ongoing conversations throughout their higher education experience, students like John achieve senior status and still talk about what might have been related to their financial aid packages. Also, without constantly reminding White students to connect what they are learning in their courses to their lives off-campus, students like Macy may compartmentalize lessons learned in college and not think of transferring newly gained knowledge to their home and work environments. McKinney (2005) observed “...middle- and working-class whites’ anger is often directed toward people of color when they feel economically disadvantaged” (p. 189). Although she spoke about this related to employment, the responses of several participants in this study were consistent with the essence of McKinney’s statement. Deliberate, intentional, and ongoing efforts are needed at the postsecondary level to teach White students about the many layers of privilege they possess in higher education as well as in their daily lives outside of campus.

Experiences with Family and Neighborhoods Before College

The students’ responses in this study are noteworthy because they validated the continuation of a concerning trend: White students are coming to campus from predominantly

White neighborhoods and schools—despite the fact that American society is more diverse than ever before in history. My findings reinforced the literature that White students experienced K-12 school systems completely absent of students of Color (Reason & Evans, 2007; Tatum, 2007) and that White parents selected homogenous schools and neighborhoods primarily based on race (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Pryor, et al., 2011; Tatum 2007). Despite higher education’s focus on promoting diversity and in light of having the highest number of students of Color enrolled in postsecondary education, White students arrive on campus largely unable to “see” or identify their own race or the privilege associated with it. All of the participants in my study talked about their childhood experiences, with some sharing painful “first time” stories with me. These accounts were communicated with childlike mannerisms and shame, denoting discomfort and unease. These first-time stories were reminiscent of Helms’ (2008) story of Sally Jane, a parable that showed how White parents taught their children “ambiguous messages” about persons of Color (p. 15). In actuality, the evidence in this study showed most students interviewed learned deliberate messages about race from their families and all-White experiences prior to Midwestern University. With few positive exceptions, the students in this study were taught being White meant living and interacting with other White people almost exclusively and that talking about race was difficult and not valued.

While higher education institutions cannot control the way students are raised or the attitudes they bring to campus, colleges and universities can teach students to interrogate their beliefs, stereotypes, and perceptions while enrolled. Critical thinking must be an integral part of the curriculum in order to ensure all members of the university community are safe and valued. Efforts to promote dialogues and education about race must be intentional –not only in response to high-profile incidents like the recent video depicting members of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon

fraternity at the University of Oklahoma singing racial slurs and statements that the organization would never admit Black members (Berrett, 2015). Examining the participant profiles and responses of several students in this study suggest that family members can have a significant influence on the formation of White students' racial identities—both in negative ways (as in the cases of John and Macy) and positive ways (as in the case of April and Kimberly). These experiences with family can be utilized by faculty and student affairs professions to help White students better understand their racial identity development. The fathers of both John and Macy presented significantly racist views that seemed to exert continued damaging influences and effects on these students years later. For April and Kimberly, having family members who were involved in social justices issues (Kimberly's grandfather was a member of Doctors without Borders) and exposure to racial difference as exciting and normal (April's father introduced her to multicultural museums and festivals) resulted openness and acceptance. Postsecondary educational environments can encourage the development and growth of healthy White racial identities by providing spaces for reflection upon negative and positive racial experiences with family members. Without deliberate and meaningful discussions about race and privilege, higher education institutions reinforce the lessons found in Helm's (2008) parable of Sally Jane in which a White child is taught that race is unspeakable, a limitation, and unimportant.

Seeing White

In the last section, participants' responses to the question of what it meant to be White were reviewed in light of the existing literature. Subsections included evidence of students exhibiting conscious and unconscious disfluencies of speech and semantic moves to avoid appearing racist or disassociate themselves from being White; the finding that several students did not feel they personally experienced advantages as a result of being White; negative and

incorrect perceptions about scholarships and college admissions; validation of earlier findings that White students continue arriving on campus from predominantly White neighborhoods and schools; and students retelling of “first time” stories with discomfort and shame. In this next section, participants’ answers about the educational and other experiences that shaped their ideas about race are presented. Subsections include: Is Midwestern University really a “Diverse” Campus, curricular and co-curricular experiences that caused White students to “see” their own race, hearing stories of persons of Color, being in a group or situation that is not White, and experiences with another element of identity: Gender and Age.

Is Midwestern University Really a “Diverse” Campus?

Participants in this study consistently described Midwestern University as a “diverse” campus, even going so far as to say it was “very diverse” (Macy and Abigail), and “one of the most diverse in the country” (John). While Midwestern University was significantly more diverse than the high schools and middle schools the students attended, it was not considered the most diverse campus in the United States or even in the top 10 (Stockwell, 2014) or top 50 (Bestcollege.com) per rankings that utilized statistics from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education System (IPEDS). Rather, these statements were indicative of just how racially isolated the participants’ lives had been prior to college.

The students interviewed for this study reported they enjoyed being at Midwestern University because they perceived it as diverse. I inferred from their answers and stories that being in courses and involved in activities at Midwestern University were the first times the majority of students in the study population had substantive conversations and interactions with persons of Color. While these interactions showed progress toward increasing the racial awareness of White students, there are also problems with White students overestimating the

level of diversity in their environment. Chapter Two contained citations showing that students on college campuses benefit academically and socially from multicultural curricular and co-curricular experiences. However, there is also literature indicating spaces of higher learning are not as universally beneficial and harmonious for all as White students often believe. Harper and Hurtado (2007) noted “White student overestimation of minority student satisfaction” as one of nine persistent themes related to campus racial climates (p. 212). When White students assume everyone feels like they do, students of Color who experience discrimination, intolerance, and racism daily are minimized further through the ignorance of their White classmates.

Several of the students in this study commented how excited they were to come to Midwestern and learn about “so many different cultures” (Abigail). John’s statement captured this seemingly good-natured White philosophy about going to school at a diverse campus. He said, “...it’s a good place to, you know, meet new people and experience new things, so it’s a good way to uh, broaden your horizons, just, learn more about different people.” In addition to being a diverse campus, several participants noted Midwestern was also an inclusive campus where everyone got along. However, when I attended two diversity programs on Midwestern’s campus during the semesters in which this study occurred, I heard students of Color tell a different story. One female student spoke in a group forum and asked where the White students were as she gestured around a room of over 50 attendees of which there were only a handful of White students in attendance. In another forum of about 125 attendees, I overheard another female student of Color remark the only reason so many White students were in attendance was because their professors required attendance for sociology class credit. During both of these programs, students voiced that when events on campus were advertised as diversity or racial discussion events, White students rarely attended.

Based on their responses during interviews for this study, I did surmise two of the participants were not interested in truly experiencing a diverse campus but rather felt it would either benefit them for future employment or was just “what you do” in college. However, I also found six of my participants seemed to have an authentic desire to interact with persons they perceived as racially different from themselves in meaningful ways while at Midwestern University. Although they did not have all the answers or feel completely comfortable navigating discussions of race, these six students were open to learning and demonstrated potential to develop healthy, non-racist White identities. The participants in this study—across all age groups—described that being on a diverse campus influenced their perceptions about race. However, it is likely that using the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale-Revised (ORAS-R) to select participants resulted in a pool of students who were drawn to discuss race and racial issues. Using the ORAS-R may have influenced the findings in my study as students who did not want to talk about their perceptions of race did not reply to my study invitation and thus, are not represented in my data. Other factors, such as the age of my participants and their place of residency, may have affected what they reported. For example, the responses of Abigail and Monroe reflect their unique situations. Abigail was 18 years of age during the interview and had lived her whole life in a rural town located almost an hour from Midwestern University. Monroe was 56 years old at the time of our interview and had grown up in the City of Detroit and lived in several suburbs since. The experiences of each student were exclusive and the results of my study are not generalizable to a larger population. Factors such as age and the locations in which students lived could have limited or contributed to their answers to my questions and thus, are noted as a limitation of this study.

White students need a more realistic understanding of the racial diversity and inequality

on most college campuses. The challenge for higher education is to find effective methods for educating White students without causing them to retreat from conversations on race due to defensiveness and guilt. Colleges and universities must determine how to show White students that attending a “diverse” campus as a spectator is not enough. Administrators and educators need ways to help White students understand their participation and engagement are integral at diversity events and discussions about race.

Curricular and Cocurricular Experiences that Caused White Students to “See” Their Race

The college classroom was cited as the central place where most of the participants in this study learned how to “see” their own race and identify White privilege while at Midwestern University. While courses in the social sciences were mentioned most often, students talked about courses within their major fields of study that also sparked insights to issues of oppression and discrimination. Students mentioned specific assignments as particularly insightful to understanding White privilege, including defining White culture, selecting photographs that represent power, reading and analyzing achievement statistics by race, discussing readings and ideas in class, and reflection activities. McKinney (2005) cited the need for “many more college courses dealing with systemic racism in the United States” (p. 224) and said the optimal place for the antiracist “re-education” of White persons is “the college classroom” (p. 225). Tatum (2007) discussed the importance of engaging college students with “multicultural perspectives” early in the college process and suggested the first-year seminar as a promising mechanism to do so (p. 122).

While the first-year seminar is the entry point for traditional age students, transfer and adult learners often bypass new student programs and miss such opportunities. Faith’s quote in Chapter Five about working on campus reminds us the majority of adult learners—particularly

those who are commuters—spend their time on campus almost exclusively in classes. Faith spoke about how working on campus provided her with opportunities to connect with diverse persons. She said most adult learners are unable to participate in many extracurricular activities due to other obligations off-campus. Administrators must work with faculty and student affairs professionals to intentionally structure the higher education experience so students of all types learn about structural racism and privilege—particularly White students. Providing a variety of intentional activities within the curriculum, through co-curricular experiences, and at extracurricular events will provide multiple contact and education points to help White students interrogate their privilege and understand the necessity to dismantle it, as well as develop the integral knowledge of cultural competency.

Hearing the Stories of Persons of Color

Six of the 10 participants in this study said they were affected by hearing persons of Color talk about their personal experiences with prejudice and discrimination. Through interactions with classmates, hearing speakers in class or at events, and spending time with friends, interviewees talked about how seeing real-life examples of racism in action and meeting those hurt by it affected their thinking about what it means to be White. When students told me about listening to speakers or friends share their story, I observed a heightened emotional state in interviewees. Their voices raised, they used their hands more while talking, and got physically involved in the retelling of the experience. In a study involving over 600 White college students writing in racial event journals, Picca and Feagin (2007) found few accounts in which White students showed sensitivity to the discrimination experienced by persons of Color. One exception was for students who had friends who experienced racial profiling encounters with police. These experiences helped White students “see” the preferential treatment White persons

receive as well as to start “to develop some understandings from the viewpoint of discrimination’s victims” (p. 236). I found similar reactions in some of my study participants.

From interviewees, I heard that their racial consciousness was raised when a particular pattern was followed. First, the White student was with a person who they perceived as racially different from themselves. The White student either saw this person struggling with or heard them telling of a prior experience with discrimination. Several White students said they asked the person of Color affected, “Does this happen to you all the time?” and received confirmatory answers. The discrimination was then seen as valid and true by the participants, causing them to reflect on the fact that they had not struggled against the same discriminatory factor they observed for the person of Color. From the accounts in this study, students said this reflection time often occurred after the event and apart from the victim. Participants told me they were able to understand White privilege on a deeper level after going through this multi-step process.

The pattern described above is problematic for a host of reasons. Having persons of Color tell their story seems promising and effective due to the few methods available for teaching White college students about their privilege and related responsibilities to dismantle it. However, this approach takes responsibility away from White people and places the burden of education on those deeply affected by racial inequality. The use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) may be helpful in educating Whites about racism and privilege. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) highlighted the benefits of applying CRT to higher education and using methods such as capturing the counter stories of persons of Color, which results in the “amplification of usually silenced voices” (p. 217). A series of deliberate, varied, and ongoing strategies are necessary to educate White students about privilege throughout their higher education experience and CRT looks to be a promising tool.

Being in a Group or Situation that is Not White

Interactions between White women and Black men were mentioned by several female participants in this study. This finding is worth noting because of the persistent and destructive stereotype that White women should, and do, fear Black men (Collins, 2005). Picca and Feagin (2007) noted White female college students wrote about this topic in their racial event journals, and indicated “some fear of black men, no matter where they were or how they looked” (p. 252). In my study, both Rachel and April recalled feeling aware, paranoid, or embarrassed that persons around them perceived or suggested a sexual relationship between themselves and African American men with whom they were interacting. Additionally, Marianne talked about feeling vulnerable when going to Detroit because she is a “young female”. Across these descriptions, White female students showed feelings of anxiety when interacting with Black men. While I included this finding as part of the experiences that caused White students to see their race (Chapter Five), I could easily have considered the responses of Rachel and April as a factor that could prevent or inhibit White female students from discussing race (Chapter Six). The confines and limitations of the interview space did not allow me to probe these participants’ statements further to gain more understanding of these experiences or to challenge the stereotypes. However, it was clear negative stereotypes did affect how these participants interacted with Black men on and off-campus and their ideas about what it meant to be a White woman. Considering these findings is important when trying to develop educational programming and interventions to increase understanding and interactions among college students. In the next section, the topic of gender identity is examined further with particular emphasis on intersectionality.

Experiences with Another Element of Identity: Gender

When I asked White students to tell me about their experiences of race, some female participants instead talked about gender. Kimberly talked about feeling marginalized in an all-White, male work environment. Faith said while she knew about the “struggles” of being a woman, she realized women who were not White experienced compounded challenges in society due to the additional burdens of racism. Marianne suggested I add the study of gender to my research because studying race was not enough to understand White college students’ experiences. Additionally, Marianne said White women would be more “empathetic” to the oppression of “minorities” because “we are often grouped with minorities.” Kimberly wondered if she could even “separate being White and being female.” These participants viewed their gender as more salient and easier to discuss than race.

While analyzing my findings, I originally classified these responses as a barrier to White students being able to see their race. However, after considering the significance of my data in light of the literature, I suggest gender could be used as a doorway to encourage White female college students to further explore and question their privilege. A study by Wolff and Munley (2012) used several assessment measures, including the ORAS-R and examined the relationships between White racial consciousness, feminist identity development, and family environment in undergraduate women. One of their findings showed “more advanced stages of feminist identity development were related to more anti-racist White racial consciousness attitudes.” Indeed, in this study, the three female students cited above demonstrated high scores on the Dominative/Integrative scale of the ORAS, affirming their high levels of racial acceptance. Because these participants identified with what they viewed as a marginalized identity, it is possible they were more conscious of other forms of oppression. In a study of White college

students, Picca and Feagin (2007) found “women were more likely than white men to be dissenters” when an interaction involving stereotypical or racist language occurred (p. 15).

Using gender as a doorway to enter conversations of race may be a useful strategy to help White women understand racism.

In my participants’ responses, I also saw attempts to make meaning across several identities, including gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status. From the field of student development literature, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) provided a reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity based on the original model suggested by Jones and McEwen (2000) that may be helpful when creating experiences to help White students see, interpret, and question their privilege. Varying educational strategies and approaches are necessary to educate White students across their many identities. Teaching White students about the matrix of domination created by Collins’s (2000) and studying intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) are additional approaches to the unwieldy task of supporting college students as they navigate their identity development. Ferber (2014) offered a promising tool worthy of more attention as it incorporated both the work of Collins and Crenshaw into a framework for teaching college students about race.

Experiences with Another Element of Identity: Age

The majority of students in my study were adult learners and non-traditional students who were over the age of 23, and each of these students talked about their age when I asked them to talk about their race. From describing their embarrassment of being the oldest person in their classes to struggling through learning new skills in addition to class content, these participants’ responses were consistent with the literature describing the age-related fears of adult students (Kasworm 2010). Despite my dogged efforts to return to questions about race, the majority of

students in my study redirected their answers to the subject of age. During the interviews, I noted the frequent discussion of age, but tried repeatedly to steer the conversation to my own interests. Upon further reflection after reviewing the interview transcripts, I realized that acknowledging age as the most salient identity for some of my participants and encouraging their discussion may have been a better response for me as a researcher. Researchers can learn from this study and remember the importance of determining and acknowledging the identity with which their participants are most strongly tied. MacKinnon and Floyd (2011) suggest, “Professionals must listen and assess carefully the stories or narratives adult students tell about their experiences. Instead of expecting adult learners to adapt, stakeholders in education must adapt to the needs of the students” (p. 328). Intervention strategies to engage White college students in discussions of race must be segmented to first address the various other identities that may be more pressing for students.

In this section, participants’ responses related to being able to see their own race were examined against the current literature. Interpretations of students’ understanding of race were offered with problematic issues highlighted and promising related intervention strategies for higher education included. The next section contains an analysis of responses related to how easily interviewees talked about their own race.

Desire and Ability to Discuss Race

Chapter Six presented evidence that participants wanted to talk about their experience of being White and about race and racism. Conditions and characteristics that encouraged the discussion of racial consciousness within this study were provided. Also underscored were the factors that students said prevented them from openly discussing race. In the next section, I examine participants’ responses in light of the available literature and consider the implications

of the findings, mirroring the data presented in Chapter Six. The subsections included in this section are: Midwestern University was a safe environment, students were eager to discuss race, and factors that prevented/inhibited White students from discussing race.

Midwestern University was a Safe Environment

In light of the literature previously presented in this study, it was established that for the most part, White people have a low degree of racial self-awareness, feel they lack a culture, have difficulty in talking about or defining their own race, and view White as being normal. Taking these aspects into consideration, I was able to find 10 students at Midwestern University who willingly met with me for several hours to talk about what it meant to be White. The students I interviewed perceived Midwestern University to be a “special” place where they could talk about race—a topic many White people are known for having difficulties discussing, especially with someone they do not know.

My sense from interviewing each of these 10 students was they would have willingly continued the conversation, and this surprised me based on my reading of the literature. Instead of encountering the speechless and confused students who provided uniform answers and tried to avoid answering my questions, I experienced students at varying levels of racial consciousness who were reflective and yet inexperienced with examining an essential and influential element of their identity. More can be done at the postsecondary level to stimulate and engage White students in these critical conversations. Additional strategies are needed to help White students extend their learning from the “special” confines of their colleges and universities to the various other realms of their lives while in and after postsecondary education. The next subsection offers some suggestions based on the sketches of four students featured in Chapter Six who showed an eagerness to discuss race.

Students Eager to Discuss Race

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of White college students' experiences related to race and more specifically to find students who could perceive and understand the meaning of Whiteness. As a result of these goals, I selected students from the ORAS-R with higher scores on the Dominative/Integrative (D/I) scale, and considered the scores on the Reactive and Conflictive scales to help me select participants. In Chapter Six, I provided sketches of three participants who were particularly engaged in the two interviews conducted for this study and one whose comments provided insight to the other end of the racial acceptance continuum: Rachel, Abigail, April, and Wayne. Among this grouping, Wayne was the outlier. He scored the lowest in the population pool on the D/I scale. However, his responses provided much to consider related to the broad spectrum of ways White students interpret their race. These students' responses are considered next in relation to the literature and the significance of the data gathered for this study.

Each of the four students featured in this section told me in various ways that they wanted to dialogue with other Whites about race and wanted to have interactions with persons of Color. Rachel admitted she did not know much about her White classmates and she had “never really *talked*” to persons from Arabic cultures, despite being among both populations constantly. Abigail reported her reason for volunteering for this study was because White people typically study how “Whites treat other races” but do not “focus on what’s actually happening to them [White students], how they’re changing.” April took this sentiment and made it more personal, stating that her classes often focused on the experiences of persons of Color, and “nobody asks ... White people what we think. They, um, generalize ... our beliefs based on who, who speaks the loudest” referring to the White upper and middle class often featured in the media.

The benefits of college students interacting with diverse groups is well-documented (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; King & Magolda, 2005; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additionally, there are studies (Ford, 2012; Hurtado, 2005; Nagda & Zuniga, 2003) showing the benefits of intergroup relations, a pedagogical model described as conversations that “bring together members of two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict” (Nagda & Zuniga, 2003, p. 113). These extended, facilitated dialogues provide opportunities for students to go far beyond simply interacting with peers. Rather, intergroup dialogues encourage students to articulate their thoughts, hear perspectives from diverse peers, and ask questions. Additionally, Ford (2012) explored the benefits of intragroup dialogues for White students and found these to be successful in engaging groups of White students in “issues of race, racism, and privilege” and produced “sophisticated and nuanced understanding of whiteness and its complexities” (p. 155). Based on my limited interactions with the students in this study, I would suggest each of the students I interviewed would have enjoyed being a part of an intragroup dialogue, as described by Ford. However, using intragroup dialogue with White students could easily be misunderstood as once again elevating the voices of White people. Judging from the students I met through this study, intragroup dialogues would also have enabled participants to gain a deeper understanding of their own racial consciousness and the range of ways White persons identify and interpret their own race. Having intragroup dialogues seems like an important precursor to help White students gain needed insight and skills before being involved in intergroup dialogues with persons of Color.

Wayne said he rethought previous stereotypes after having extended contact with a student he described as Arab American through one of his classes at Northwestern University.

After being in prison for over a decade, Wayne said he had a very difficult time containing his emotions and this prevented him from being able to articulate his feelings verbally either to the student or to others in conversation. Instead, he wrote a paper several semesters later about his feelings and read a portion of it to some of his classmates. For Wayne, this writing about his realizations about race provided a way for him to process his feelings and experiences in a controlled environment. While I was opposed to many of the statements Wayne made during his interview, his responses provided me with much to consider about the range of ways White persons interpret their race. I am certain the reflection paper he described would have provided me with additional insights into understanding White persons who identify as strongly Dominative and Conflictive on the ORAS-R. Several researchers used autobiographical journals to study racial issues (McKinney, 2005; Myers & Williamson, 2001; Picca & Feagin, 2007) and have reported success in conceptualizing the experiences of White college students. These writing pedagogies could be implemented in college classes to stimulate reflection for White students.

Factors that Prevented/Inhibited White Students from Discussing Race

Participants named various factors that caused them to avoid talking about race or addressing racism both while at Midwestern University and in their lives while away from campus. These reasons included friends and family members students described as racist, perceived power differentials due to gender, age, faculty members, and persons of Color. This section contains an examination and discussion of each factor.

Whites need to be forced to talk about race. Overall, students interviewed for this study said they felt Whites needed to be “forced” into having conversations about race—themselves included. Rachel said most White people were “oblivious to race, gender, and age issues.” Faith

said she did not often consider her own race until someone or an event focused the conversation on being White or race. April voiced feeling frustrated that classroom conversations were often focused on blaming White persons for racism. What I heard from these students was while they wanted to engage in conversations about their own race, they needed required, ongoing, and educational opportunities to do so. The theoretical framework suggested by Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) was created to “promote higher levels of White racial consciousness” and “deepen student understanding of culture and privilege” (p. 220). Their multicultural educational framework provided a five step approach that takes students on a structured and deliberate journey from defining what culture is through deconstructing White culture and finally to acquiring a multicultural outlook. This promising educational practice should be considered and required by higher education institutions in conjunction with first-year seminar programs, general education courses, and other required elements of undergraduate programming. In the words of Jillian Kinzie of Indiana University and known for her work with the National Survey of Student Engagement, “Students don’t do optional” (Kinzie, 2013). Higher education can no longer leave to chance that White students will gain an appreciation for diversity as is mentioned in so many mission statements of colleges and universities. Instead, activities that increase the understanding of White students’ racial identity need to be intentional and thoughtfully woven throughout the required curriculum and co-curriculum.

Friends and family members. In this study, some students talked about living in two very different worlds related to their racial identity. At Midwestern University, students said they saw an inclusive environment that was comprised of diverse populations and encouraged dialogue across race. At home and away from campus, several students reported having relatives and friends they characterized as “racist” and “bigoted.” These students described themselves as

thinking and acting differently than their intolerant and discriminatory White family and friends. However, after analyzing students' transcripts across both interviews, I observed several instances of the participants themselves making racially uninformed statements. John, who described his father as racist and unwilling to change at one point in our time together, also said,

I think with affirmative action, like, with someone, if I had been, you know, a diff-if I hadn't been a White male with my grades and my test scores, I think I would have gotten more financial compensation, just straight up.

John's comment was particularly disturbing because he was already receiving what he described as "pretty much a full-ride" scholarship at Midwestern University and yet felt he deserved more. John's statement also suggested he misunderstood affirmative action. The research of Solórzano, Ceja, and Yasso (2000) documented the experiences of African American students and the way microaggressions negatively affected their daily lives through ignorant and hurtful statements made by White students on subjects such as college admissions. John was able to identify his father's racism but not his own.

In Macy's interviews, she talked about trying to educate her daughters about racism while living with a husband who she said was, "extremely ... racist, bigoted ... redneck." Earlier in the interview, she spoke with such regret about having been raised by a father who "wrote the book" on racism. Macy admitted the contradiction of her statements: she was uncomfortable with the intolerance of her childhood and then married a man who was also prejudiced. She talked about having learned so much at Midwestern University about racism, diversity, and inclusion. Yet, she seemed unaware she made several racially biased statements in her interview about persons receiving food and living assistance. As an adult learner who was pursuing a degree in sociology and enjoyed courses in women and gender studies, Macy was also raising

children with a husband she described as “set in his ways.” She acknowledged the paradoxes that were part of her story but admitted she lacked the ability to change her situation at present and did not have strategies to improve it.

White students like John and Macy need help understanding the history and roots of racism first and at the same time, need to gain practical strategies for interrupting racism with family members in their homes. The work of Kendall (2013) could be helpful in accomplishing both of these tasks, as she offers practical checklists and examples of concrete statements that can help White college students understand what White privilege and racism looks like in everyday life. For White students who are working through learning about racism and trying to gain a healthier racial identity while living with family members who are not doing this same work, being at a place like Midwestern University provided important experiences for growth. Postsecondary education can provide students with tools and resources to extend their learning beyond campus so they do not have to live the “split life” Macy described. To effectively interrupt racism wherever it occurs, White students need deliberate practice in an environment where they can feel comfortable to talk about race, make mistakes, build skills and competence, and gain confidence in their abilities. Colleges and universities must provide such an educational environment for students.

Power Differentials. Students reported a significant reason that prevented them from speaking up about, questioning, or discussing race while in college was they understood there to be power differentials between themselves and others. While gender and age have already been addressed, the influence of faculty members has not. Interviewees said socioeconomic status, race, and their status as students caused them to be withdrawn and silent in the classroom. When faculty members led discussions on race, White students said they felt “diminished” as described

by April and out-of-place as described by Monroe. The students only presented their side of the exchange and were working through the dissonance of processing many ideas that could have affected their understanding of their race. However, if White students perceived faculty were not providing reasonable and safe places for dialogue across the students' multiple identities, participants reported disengaging from the conversation.

At many times during this study, I was frustrated with the uninformed and insensitive responses of students and yet felt compelled to remain in the conversation to better understand how to work through their ignorance of privilege in order to learn more about White racial identity development. McKinney (2005) offered suggestions for faculty to use pedagogically, such as hosting speakers who have experienced racism directly, being cognizant of actions that will shut down engagement for White students while still challenging their privilege, and "carefully defining terms" such as "race" and "ethnicity" (p. 225). Tatum (2007) underscored the importance of all who work in higher education to admit that we may not have all the tools necessary to "facilitate these conversations ourselves" and that mistakes will be made and ongoing education is needed. Faculty may have a difficult time admitting they feel unprepared for conversations about race and it is crucial for them to do so since professors spend much time with students and have great influence. Ongoing faculty professional development and keeping current with the latest research in pedagogical journals are ways faculty can ensure they provide a safe and stimulating environment for all students involved.

Seeing Racism

In her seminal work about racial identity, Helms (1993) offered the following dictum about White racial identity development:

In order to develop a healthy White identity, defined in part as a nonracist identity,

virtually every White person in the United States must overcome one or more of these [individual, institutional, or cultural] racism. Additionally, he or she must accept his or her own Whiteness, the cultural implication of being White, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another (p.49).

Although I did not include the topic of racism in my interview protocol, I was hopeful participants would talk about it, in line with Helms' statement. Several students introduced the subject of racism in our conversations and I asked as many follow-up questions as possible to explore how participants made sense of it. Rachel and Marianne proudly provided textbook definitions of terms they learned in their studies at Midwestern University. Rachel explained race was socially constructed and therefore should not be used to classify people. Marianne offered an explanation of structural racism that sounded polished. However, both students' words seemed to portray only a surface level understanding of these concepts. More disappointing were the statements of students who either provided direct examples or responses that indicated a lack of understanding racism or contradicted the lessons they told me they learned. Additionally, few students admitted to acting in a prejudiced way in their own lives. Research suggested contemporary college students have acted in ways consistent with colorblind racism (Reason & Evans, 2007). Additionally, participants in this study and the majority of White college students very likely have acted in conscious and or unconscious ways that could be categorized as racial microaggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Not only are White students ignorant of the privileges their race guarantees them, they also overrate how satisfied students of Color are with their college experience (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; McKinney, 2005), which blinds them further to the damaging effects of prejudice on college campuses.

Responses about living in the most segregated racial/ethnic area in the United States were of particular significance in this study. I am not aware of another study that queried White college students about their interpretations of why the metropolitan Detroit area is so uniquely separated by race. Participants' seemed to struggle most with the word "segregated" because it seemed they felt that was a part of the distant past and not relevant to today's society. However, over and over students said they "never put two and two together" or never heard that this modern segregation was factual. Students acknowledged the racial and socioeconomic divides and said they were aware Detroit had a majority African American population and Dearborn had the highest concentration of persons of Middle Eastern or Arab American descent. The only piece of the equation students had not calculated was that they themselves were persons who lived in the predominantly White suburbs. Participants were either unaware or unwilling to admit that poverty, employment, transportation, and quality of life issues in the Metropolitan Detroit area were related to segregation—and the most disadvantaged persons were persons of Color.

When participants were asked what they knew about the history of how the greater Detroit area became so segregated, an insidious feature of color blind racism was evident in students' answers. Bonilla-Silva (2006) found that when asked about segregation patterns of neighborhoods and schools, half of the respondents in his research used what he called the "naturalization frame" to explain White persons' choices to live apart from persons of Color and then view racial groupings as "that's the way it is" (p.37). Even students who demonstrated higher levels of racial acceptance via the ORAS-R offered answers that were aligned with color blind racism when attempting to explain the racial housing patterns in and around Midwestern University. Despite being at an institution that students said fostered inclusiveness and diversity

and studying subjects focused heavily on inequality, participants in this study had much to learn about racial discrimination and consequently as suggested by Helms in the quote at the start of this subsection, about developing a healthy, antiracist White identity.

Limitations

This study examined the nature of the experiences of White college students related to race in an attempt to determine what educational and other types of events led to students being able to “see” their own race. The findings of this study were not intended to be generalized to other populations or locations but instead to provide a rich explanation and understanding of a discreet group of persons at one institution, in line with the descriptive aims of qualitative research. This study was limited in a number of ways, including study population, usage of the ORAS-R, and the conditions under which the study was conducted. This section includes an examination of these limitations.

At 10 participants, the population for this study was small but did contain variety. There were only two men in the pool, and the remaining interviewees were women. Six of the students were over the age of 25 years old, providing much needed data on non-traditionally aged adult learners. From the responses received from my emailed study invitation, I chose not to select some students who were under the age of 25. Participants were recruited from several resource centers and programs on campus, which may have biased the population in favor of students who are more engaged in campus activities. In order to participate, students had to have access to a computer and be willing to meet me twice on campus, which may have dissuaded some students who did not have transportation or technology from participating. My sample contained slightly more students who were pursuing careers in the social science or public service fields, and these students may have had more exposure to courses in which societal inequality was studied.

There were also limitations in the design of the study and the methods used to collect data. Meeting with students for only two interviews provided but a small glimpse into the complex area of racial identity. I was able to obtain an incomplete and minimal profile of students at best. Also, racial consciousness and identity are fluid and constantly changing. The responses of participants provided a snapshot of a few particular points in time. Additionally, the ORAS-R was intended to be used with larger sample sizes and measures racial consciousness at a given point in time when the instrument is completed. While the ORAS-R helped me select students who displayed each of the four types, there may have been events in students' lives that caused them to change before and/or after each of the interviews completed.

Implications

White college students in this study wanted to talk about race but needed several conditions and tools in order to do this successfully. In addition to needing a safe space and a non-judgmental dialogue partner, participants needed time to reflect and respond as well as the space to explain answers and ask for clarification. While these conditions are not always available in the world outside the walls of academia, my findings suggest higher education has an opportunity to engage White students in conversations of race, guide them in navigating their own racial consciousness and identity development, and help them become full participants in opposing racism. I must acknowledge the possibility that using the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale-Revised (ORAS-R) may have resulted in my sample including a population of students who wanted to talk about being White and their experiences with racial issues. Students who were not comfortable talking about race most likely did not respond to my survey invitation and this may have affected my results. Also, the ages of students in my population and where they resided prior to being interviewed may have affected what was reported. However, these

limitations withstanding, the findings of this study provide some insights into the situations and experiences of ten White students at Midwestern University. While these results are not generalizable, the findings add to the ongoing conversation about race and diversity in higher education. Colleges and universities can truly live their mission statements and achieve their educational outcomes of instilling in students an awareness and appreciation of diversity by ensuring White students learn the history and current ways their privilege oppresses others and the language and skills necessary to navigate a multiracial society. The next section includes implications for practice and policy.

Implications for Practice

In much of the literature, I saw studies and articles written by scholars and activists who are livid about racial inequality, and rightfully so. I had the fortune of hearing several of these scholars speak at Midwestern University, and they were unapologetically angry and passionate about decrying the oppressiveness of White culture that permeates postsecondary education as they advocated for justice for students of Color. Outrage and impassioned condemnations are absolutely necessary to confront privilege, eliminate racism, and change the landscape of higher education as well as society. At the same time, approaches faculty and student affairs professionals take when working directly with White students must be different in order to achieve the desired educational outcomes of inspiring awareness and appreciation of diversity.

In order to provide supportive spaces for conversations on race to be effective, students need educators who are skilled in working across the many ways in which White populations identify themselves (e.g., social, racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, and gender identity, etc. (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Bondi, 2012; Wolff & Munley, 2012). Demonstrating competence in these areas and being well-credentialed are essential for faculty as well as student affairs

practitioners involved in leading discussions of race. Granted, many faculty may not be comfortable discussing race or admitting their lack of knowledge of techniques and pedagogies to do so effectively. More so, faculty may not want to confess that they do not have experience leading conversations on race, particularly if their discipline or subject area does not explicitly include race. Fortunately, there are a number of studies and theoretical papers that provide pedagogical recommendations and practical strategies for teaching a variety of students in a range of subject areas about race, privilege, and racism. Faculty are warned that White students often struggle in classrooms that are diverse, and may openly challenge faculty when talking about race and racism (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Cho, 2011) or become silent and disengage from discussion (Carter et al., 2007). These authors advocate that faculty read as much as possible about how to facilitate conversations about race successfully so as to provide an environment in which White privilege can be identified and named, promoting learning for all students. Lensmire (2010) suggests, “White racial identities are multifarious messes of thought and feeling” and encourages faculty to “remain attentive to the pedagogical possibilities of complexity and conflict” (p. 170). Additional studies have yielded much insight on topics such as: working with White male college students as they process the meaning of race, the importance of locating students’ racial identity development, the ways White students present defensive strategies to avoid discussions of race in the classroom, and how teaching White students about oppression and privilege has led to the adoption of more comprehensive appreciation of race (Ambrosio, 2013; Cabrera, 2012; Dunn, Dotson, Ford, & Roberts, 2014; and Dass-Brailsford, 2007).

Professional development for faculty is necessary, and yet must be planned in accordance with the type of institution and related responsibilities of faculty. Institutions that are small

and/or faith-based may embark upon professional development reaching the majority of faculty, while the same approach may be challenging for large, research institutions in which priority is given to research and publishing. Attention must be given to considering how professional development could be incorporated into the tenure and reward system for faculty. Student affairs professionals may benefit from workshops such as those provided by The National Intergroup Dialogue Institute at the University of Michigan or professional organizations such as NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Institutions could send small groups of faculty or staff to quality training experiences and then have those individuals educate others on campus. These efforts may be expensive in both monetary and time resources but can build competence for faculty and student affairs professionals.

Students in this study articulated several factors that caused them to disengage from discussions of race, including perceived power differentials based on gender, age, faculty member presence, and working in groups where persons of Color are present. McKinney (2005) cited additionally “fears of social awkwardness or interpersonal discomfort and tension” may prevent White students from talking about and across race. Faculty can consider these factors when preparing lessons. An examination of the classroom environment through Kivel’s (2011) questions for assessing the culture of power can help faculty unearth assumptions and areas of pedagogical bias in the classroom. Using pedagogies such as the multicultural framework suggested by Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) can assist faculty in constructing meaningful lessons that “increase the multicultural understanding of all students, but especially White students” (p. 226). Incorporating these types of strategies may not be possible in all courses but are necessary parts of the overall postsecondary educational experience of White students.

Another recommendation that benefits all students is to teach them practical strategies for

interrupting and addressing racism when it happens on campus and in their lives away from campus. Students in this study said they learned about racism when hearing persons of Color share their personal stories of discrimination which may be one method for raising students' awareness of large scale prejudice. To avoid burdening persons of Color with the responsibility of educating students about these issues, White staff and faculty need to engage in this work and share the responsibility of helping White students learn about racism. Students should also be taught about racial microaggressions that typically occur in college spaces, such as the events documented by Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000). While data and theory are important to increasing understanding and awareness, the outcome of learning for White college students must be real-world tactics they can use to disrupt racial jokes, slurs, and stereotypes when they are voiced by partners, family members, friends, and classmates.

Any recommendation directed solely to benefit White students may draw scorn from many in the field as reifying the White hegemony that is distressingly present in higher education and American society and channeling scarce resources away from the students who are most underserved. However, the only way to make steady and long-term progress in helping White college students see their own race, the privileges associated with it, and the effects of racism is to draw students into intentional, required, ongoing, and well-facilitated campus experiences. White students, who comprise the largest part of enrollment in higher education today, need to be present during discussions of race and to stay engaged. Making the needed changes in college and university settings will take substantial effort at all levels of the organization, and these approaches must be appropriate to the audiences. To truly live out the prevalent postsecondary missions of promoting diversity and social justice, student affairs practitioners and faculty need to determine where White students are in their journey toward developing a nonracist White

identity and support them as they navigate through new spaces and experiences. This work is not more important than righting the many wrongs experienced by students of Color in the current system. Instead, substantial efforts must be made to support all students on their journey to understanding their multiple identities and identifying and breaking down systems of oppression. White students have an important role to play in this effort and need to be taught about their responsibilities in the pursuit of social justice.

Implications for Policy

Colleges and universities can no longer simply offer mission statements promising to promote diversity or make efforts to recruit diverse incoming classes of students, staff, and faculty to insure equality across higher education today. With ample evidence to prove that the majority of students enrolled in postsecondary education are White and those students are not able to identify their racial privilege or racism, leaders of postsecondary institutions must create policies addressing these disparities or risk reinforcing them.

At the highest levels, educational administrators of both K-12 and postsecondary institutions must commit to requiring all students participate in high-quality multicultural educational experiences. While this goal is lofty, there is a need to address students' lack of cultural competence before they arrive on college campuses. Assuming students complete their undergraduate education within four years, colleges and universities may have only a limited time to influence students. Chesler, Peet, & Sevig (2003) found White students in their study at the University of Michigan stated "once in college, they still did not think about themselves as being white—even in the presence of diversity; no one and no program invited or required them to" (p. 224). While there are a variety of institutional types, administrators can create policies that require students to complete coursework and cocurricular activities that satisfy a general

education or university requirement for cultural competency. Participants in my study who said they wanted to talk about race but needed to be “forced” to provide additional support for this suggestion. Participants reported courses in sociology and psychology caused them to make life-changing discoveries about inequality and oppression. Making these opportunities mandatory for students will not be easy but will be worth the effort.

To alleviate the anxiety and myths that are by-products of the college admissions processes and scholarship awards, institutions need to share as much of this information as possible well before potential students arrive on campus. While institutions of higher learning cannot control what high school students think or hear about affirmative action and scholarship processes, admissions officers and other university staff can visit high schools and sponsor workshops on campus to share real information about who gets in and why and how scholarships are awarded based on merit, athletic or legacy status. The need to share data with incoming students about admissions and scholarship awards are not relegated for just selective institutions, as students in my pilot study conducted at a small, private, institution that was not highly selective shared their erroneous beliefs and concerns that students of Color received the vast majority of scholarships on their campus. Universities also need to share updated information with existing students as they make their way through the institution on their way to graduation. The students I interviewed talked about how much they enjoyed and benefitted from having experiences with diverse peers on campuses like Midwestern University, particularly those whom had come to campus from predominantly White school and neighborhood experiences. The confines of this study did not permit me to explain to students how valuable those interactions were, nor to challenge some of the insensitive responses they provided. Higher education can erase some of the unnecessary mystery around the admissions and funding

processes by sharing real and meaningful data with students and helping them interpret it in light of larger social justice issues within education.

Areas for Future Research

Much has been written in recent years about a “new” subtler racism that has replaced the previous Jim Crow era of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Neville, Yeung, Todd, Spanierman, & Reed, 2011; Poteat & Spanierman, 2012). This belief that race does not need to be discussed and racism is an old construct was echoed in the responses of several participants in my student when I queried them about the future of race relations. The ORAS-R instrument I used to assess my study participants’ racial consciousness was originally developed in 1996 and reconceptualized in 2002, before much of the recent research and findings on color blind ideologies were published. Since the ORAS-R is still one of the few tools to determine White racial consciousness, more research is needed to determine if the language in the questions on the tool stands up to the test of time and the progression and transformation of racism. As I read through the questions and saw words such as “minorities” “minority” being used on the ORAS-R, I wondered if today’s White college student raised in a colorblind society would respond differently to that type of language than a college student almost 20 years ago.

The scope of this study did not allow me to gather specific demographic information about students’ socioeconomic status, although all students shared this indirectly through their answers to my open-ended questions. In this study, students who self-reported that they struggled financially had lower scores on the ORAS-R on the Dominative/Integrative scale, but this was not true of all students. More research is needed to determine if socioeconomic status has an influence on the racial consciousness and racial identity of White students.

An interesting finding in this study was that despite the fact that nine of the 10 students were raised in predominantly White schools and neighborhoods and had few childhood friends who were persons of Color, seven of these students showed themselves to be actively engaged in working against issues of discrimination or oppression or well on their way to learning how to do so. Hardiman (2001) called for more research on “how and why some Whites come to reject privilege and racist-defined sense of self while others see themselves as victims of affirmative action and champions of race-based privilege” (p. 122). More research in this area would enable institutions of higher learning to develop better educational tools to help assess where White students are in their racial development and interventions to support them in achieving higher levels of racial acceptance.

Understanding more about how students develop individual facets of their identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, social class and how these identities work in conjunction with each other would help faculty and student affairs practitioners develop better strategies for teaching White students about race and racism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

Introduction: When the participant arrived and we were comfortably situated, I introduced myself and provided a bit of information about my background. I thanked the student for participating in my research.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was explained. I stated that the reason for conducting this research was to understand how White students at Midwestern University experienced their own race while in college. I explained that the study was being conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation requirements at Michigan State University.

Procedures: I informed students that pseudonyms would be used instead of their actual names and that all interviews would be audio recorded with me being the only researcher with access to the recordings. After briefly reviewing the Consent Form and emphasizing confidentiality, I provided participants with two copies. Students were encouraged to take time to review the forms. If they elected not to participate, I thanked them and ended the meeting. If they agreed to continue with the interview, I asked them to sign both forms and returned one copy to them. I explained to participants that the first interview would last about one hour and consist of open-ended questions and follow-up questions to clarify responses. Students were informed that transcripts would be created after the first interview and then available for their review during a second interview. Participants were also informed that I would be taking notes during both interviews. Finally, I told participants that at the end of the second interview, I would provide them with a \$25 gift card to show my appreciation for their time.

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me your name.
2. Please select a pseudonym for yourself that I will use in my notes and transcripts.
3. Please describe your standing at the institution (i.e., first-year student, sophomore, etc.) and your major/minor.
4. Tell me a little more about you.
5. Tell me about the demographic composition of students in your grade school, high school, and neighborhood before you came to college.
6. When you think of yourself, do you identify as a White person?
7. Describe what being a White person means to you.
8. Tell me about any family discussions you have had about being White.
9. How has being White affected your life while in college?
10. Think of a time when you were very aware of being White. Please describe that event.

Note: I will try to determine if the student has the “skills and consciousness (or instructional and experiential assistance) to deal with or act on it productively” (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 224).

11. Have you ever had conversations with other college students about being White? If so, please describe a few of those conversations.
12. On a daily basis, how aware are you that you are White?
13. How does being White impact your daily life?
 - a. Have you noticed an advantages or disadvantages of being White? Tell me about a few.
14. Were you aware that Midwestern University is located in one of the most segregated racial/ethnic areas in the United States?
 - a. The City of Detroit has residents that are primarily African American, the City of Dearborn has the highest concentration of Arab Americans living in the U.S., and the majority of the surrounding suburbs are predominantly White.
 - b. What has your experience been as a White student living in this area?
15. Think about any experiences you may have had in college that caused you to think about being White. Describe those experiences.
 - a. If student struggles, I might suggest a class, service-learning project, movie night, or other diversity or multicultural programming.
16. Do you think that most other White students share your ideas about what it means to be White? Tell me about that.
17. Has your idea of what it means to be White changed at all since you started college? Explain.
18. What else would you like to tell me about your experiences in college as a White student?

APPENDIX B: Invitations to Participate

Email Invitation to Study

Greetings,

My name is Chris Benson, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University. I invite you to participate in a study that will be part of my dissertation research. My purpose is to understand how White college students experience their own race while enrolled in college courses.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete one email questionnaire and participate in two face-to-face interviews during the Spring-Summer 2014/Fall 2014 semester/Winter 2015 semester(s). In sum, this will take approximately 75-90 minutes of your time. The interviews will be audio taped so that I can accurately transcribe what we discuss. The recording will be destroyed after my research is completed. All information recorded from the interview will be kept under a pseudonym that you choose. Your name will not be used in any written records or reports.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation.

There is no cost to participate in this study. After completing the second interview in the study, you will receive a \$25 gift card for a restaurant or store for your participation.

If you are interested in being part of this study, please reply to this email. If you have any questions, please contact me at (734) 432-5430 (office) or (313) 215-7905 (cell) or via email at bensonc4@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 5173552180, Fax 5174324503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

With gratitude,

Chris Benson
MSU HALE Doctoral Student
Bensonc4@msu.edu
(734) 432-5430

Email Questionnaire

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study for my dissertation program at Michigan State University. As I mentioned in my previous email, my purpose is to understand how White college students experience their own race while enrolled in college. Your participation will help me complete my research.

Please reply to this email with answers to the questions below. From the completed responses I receive, I will select students to participate in one-on-one interviews with me. You may or may not be selected to participate in two interviews during the Spring Summer 2014/Fall 2014 semester/Winter 2015 semester(s).

In sum, the two interviews will take approximately 75-90 minutes of your time. The interviews will consist of open-ended questions about your ideas and perceptions about being a White college student. The interviews will be audio taped, I will create transcripts, and the recordings will be destroyed after my research is completed. All information recorded from the interview will be kept under a pseudonym that you choose. Your name will not be used in any written records or reports.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation.

There is no cost to participate in this study. After completing the second interview of the study, you will receive a \$25 gift card for a restaurant or store for your participation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (734) 432-5430 (office) or (313) 215-7905 (cell) or via email at bensonc4@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 5173552180, Fax 5174324503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Please answer the questions below and send your reply to me via email.

With gratitude,

Chris Benson
MSU HALE Doctoral Student
Bensonc4@msu.edu
(734) 432-5430

Questionnaire

Your Name:

Preferred email address:

Preferred phone number:

Major:

With which racial or ethnic group(s) do you *most* identify?

- African-American (non-Hispanic)
- Asian/Pacific Islanders
- Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic),
- Latino or Hispanic
- Native American or Aleut, or Other

Age:

Days/times you are available to be interviewed:

For the next series of statements, please indicate your level of disagreement (from strongly disagree as a 1 to somewhat disagree as a 2) or agreement (from somewhat as a 4 to strongly as a 5). If you neither agree nor disagree, indicate 3.

| Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate your feelings about the following statements using the scale above.

- _____ 1. I can accept minorities intellectually, yet emotionally I'm not really sure.
- _____ 2. Minorities deserve special help in education.
- _____ 3. Welfare programs are used too much by minorities.
- _____ 4. In selecting my friends, race and culture are just not important.
- _____ 5. Being White gives us a responsibility toward minorities.
- _____ 6. I don't want to deal much with minorities because they are different in ways that I don't like.
- _____ 7. Minorities have more influence on government programs than they should have.
- _____ 8. I don't mind being one of the few Whites in a group of minority people.
- _____ 9. Sometimes I feel guilty about being White when I think about all the bad things Whites have done to minorities.

- _____ 10. I believe that minority people are probably not as smart as Whites.
- _____ 11. Previous ethnic groups, such as the Irish or Italians, adapted to American culture without massive government aid programs, and that is what minorities today should do.
- _____ 12. I am comfortable with my non-racist attitude toward minorities.
- _____ 13. Whites have an unfair advantage over minorities.
- _____ 14. Minorities deserve to be treated fairly, but they demand too much.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please indicate your feelings about the following statements using the scale above.

- _____ 15. I believe that it is society's responsibility to help minority people whether they want it or not.
- _____ 16. Over the past few years the government has paid more attention to minority concerns than they deserve.
- _____ 17. If a minority family with about the same income and education as I have moved next door, I would not like it at all.
- _____ 18. It's impossible to get a fair deal if you are a minority person.
- _____ 19. Minorities get more media attention than is necessary.
- _____ 20. The advantages that Whites get are taken for granted.
- _____ 21. About all that is necessary to achieve racial equality in the U.S. has been done.

Questions from the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale, Revised [ORAS-R]. Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Email Invitation to Interview

Hello, Thank you for completing the questionnaire I recently sent you and agreeing to participate in the research study for my dissertation program at Michigan State University. My purpose is to understand how White college students experience their own race while enrolled in college. Your participation will help me with this research and is greatly appreciated.

Based on your response and willingness to participate, I would like to schedule an interview with you. The first interview will consist of several open-ended questions about your ideas and perceptions about being a White college student and will take about 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped , I will create transcripts, and the recordings will be destroyed after my research is completed. All information recorded from the interview will be kept under a pseudonym that you choose. Your name will not be used in any written records or reports.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation.

There is no cost to participate in this study. After completing the second interview of the study, you will receive a \$25 gift card for a restaurant or store for your participation.

Please reply to let me know which of the following days/times work with your schedule for an interview:
<INSERT DATES/TIMES>

We can meet wherever you are most comfortable, provided it is fairly quiet as I will be audio taping our conversation. Please suggest a few locations or let me know if you would like me to find a place for us to meet. I am happy to travel to a location that is convenient for you.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (734) 432-5430 (office) or (313) 215-7905 (cell) or via email at benonc4@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 5173552180, Fax 5174324503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you so very much for your assistance!

With gratitude,

Chris Benson
HALE Doctoral Student
Benonc4@msu.edu
(734) 432-5430

APPENDIX C: Research Participant Information and Consent Form

UNDERSTANDING HOW WHITE COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THEIR OWN RACE WHILE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Explanation of the Research:

This is a research project being done as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree at Michigan State University. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently a college student. The purpose of this study is to learn about how White college students experience and interpret their own race while enrolled in college. About 25 people will take part in this study.

If you take part in this study, you are being asked to complete one email questionnaire and participate in two interviews during the Fall 2014/Winter 2015 semester(s). In sum, this will take approximately 75-90 minutes of your time.

Audio tape will be used to help me reflect on the information I learn. It will also be used to create transcripts. All information recorded from the interview will be kept under a pseudonym that you choose. Your name will not be used in any written records or reports, and interview notes will only be reviewed by me (the researcher). The audio recordings will never be used in any presentations and will only be listened to by the researcher. The recordings will be destroyed after I create acceptable transcripts.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation.

Costs and Compensation for Being in the Study: There is no cost to participate in this study. After completing the second interview of the study, you will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation.

Contact Information for Questions or Concerns: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher, Christine Benson, at (734) 432-5430 (office) or (313) 215-7905 (cell) or via email at bensonc4@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 5173552180, Fax 5174324503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Documentation of Informed Consent Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name: _____

APPENDIX D: Summary Table of Study Participants

Table 2: Summary Table of Study Participants

| Pseudonym | Age | Standing | Major/ Program of Study (All pursuing Bachelor's Degree) | Residence Status (At Time of Interview) | Part-Time or Full-Time Student | Locations Participant has Lived | Employment Status |
|-----------|-----|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Wayne | 67 | Senior | General studies | Off-campus | Part-time | South Dakota, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Rachel | 30 | Sophomore | Public communications/ Culture studies | Off-campus; with parents | Part-time | Maryland, suburb of Detroit | Full-time |
| Macy | 43 | Sophomore | Criminal Justice/sociology | Off-campus | Part-time | Various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| Marianne | 27 | Senior | Political Science | Off-campus | Part-time | Various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| John | 21 | Senior | Communications | Off-campus; with parents | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Not employed |
| Monroe | 56 | Sophomore | Criminal Justice | Off-campus | Part-time | Detroit, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Faith | 37 | Junior | General studies | Off-campus | Part-time | Illinois, various suburbs of Detroit | Full-time |
| Abigail | 18 | First-Year | Biology / Psychology | On-campus apartments | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Not employed |
| April | 23 | Graduate Student | Teaching Social Work Bachelor's | Off-campus with mother | Full-time | Detroit, various suburbs of Detroit | Not employed |
| Kimberly | 21 | Senior | Industrial Engineering & Chemistry | Off-campus | Full-time | Suburb of Detroit | Internship |

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