

**DIVERSITY DISTRESS: THE EXPERIENCES OF
STUDENTS OF COLOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

A Thesis

by

BEVERLY MARIE PRATT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2009

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Rogelio Saenz
Committee Members,	Joseph O. Jewell
	Marco Portales
Head of Department,	Mark Fossett

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ABSTRACT

Diversity Distress: The Experiences of Students of Color in Higher Education.

(December 2009)

Beverly Marie Pratt, B.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Rogelio Saenz

In this study, I specify the reasons why racial minority undergraduate students choose to pursue higher education studies at historically White colleges/universities, despite the schools' potential for diversity controversies. Rather than looking at why students do not attend historically White institutions, I investigate what characteristics of both the educational institutions and the students contribute to students' decisions to stay at historically White institutions despite perceived hostile environments. I also examine students' experiences at historically White institutions, including attitudes toward diversity and any discrimination that they may experience. In doing so, this study adds a fresh yet central perspective to the complex issue of diversity: the opinions of students of color themselves. Doing so may lead to more positive answers and propositions for what administrations can do to increase the percentage of racial minority students.

The study is a mixed-methods approach, including 17 semi-structured interviews with Latina/o students and a sample of 287 students who self-identify as racial minorities, including Latina/os, African Americans, and Asian Americans, at a historically White southern university.

From these mixed-method results, the following themes were found: 1) The size of a hometown has a statistically significant effect on how often discrimination is experienced, 2) Self-identifying as Black has a statistically significant effect on how often discrimination is experienced, 3) Latina/o students choose to attend SCU because of university affordability, proximity to their home towns, and the university's academic reputation, 4) Latina/o students experience racial oppression at SCU because of the lack of campus diversity, direct racist acts toward themselves and friends, and they consider transferring to more diverse educational institutions, and 5) Latina/o students remain at SCU because they want to make a difference at the university for themselves and others, certain characteristics of the university are appealing, and because of professorial mentors.

DEDICATION

For Adrian Roberto Pratt, Jr., my brother and friend

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In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster states, “books are best written in community” (Foster 1988: vi). Although this is a thesis, not exactly a book, it has still taken a community to have it written – a community that I am immeasurably thankful for!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a major public institution of higher education, [South Central University] has both an extraordinary opportunity and a special responsibility to create and maintain a climate that affirms diversity of persons as well as diversity of views. Diversity is an indispensable component of academic excellence. A commitment to diversity means a commitment to the inclusion, welcome, and support of individuals from all groups, encompassing the various characteristics of persons in our community. Among these characteristics are race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. As we harness the power of diversity, we will provide students, faculty, and staff a university experience rich in perspectives and opportunities to learn from each other. In the spirit of shared responsibility, we encourage each University unit, student organization, and campus community member to help make our campus a welcoming place for all.

- South Central University's "Commitment to Diversity"

The subject of racial diversity is of particular importance to the administration, faculty, and students of historically White colleges/universities throughout the United States. In recent years, the admission, retention, and graduation of students at historically White colleges/universities that self-identify as racial minorities has been stressed, questioned, and examined at local, state, and national levels, including university symposiums, public policy debates, and Supreme Court actions.

While the practice of racial diversity has been scrutinized, very few professional accounts actively seek to understand the experiences of students of color at the educational institutions where their contribution to diversity is being evaluated. Even within sociology, the current literature is rather lacking concerning actual student

accounts of their experiences as racial minorities in historically White educational institutions, though the number is growing.

Traditionally noted as hotbeds for political and social activities, contemporary educational campuses showcase the enormity of current racial tensions. Look no farther than Jena, Louisiana to see an example of Black students' experiences at a predominately White high school campus¹. Even a noose found on the door of a Black professor's Columbia University office, a domino racist act in reaction to the freedom protestors of the Jena Six, is but another example demonstrating current racism against people of color at a higher educational institution, an Ivy League one at that². And in 2007, White students at the University of Delaware held a "Cinco de Mayo" party dressing up as "lawn-workers" and "house-cleaners" wearing shirts labeled with the word "spic" and the nametags of "Juan," "Carlos," et cetera (Smith 2007). Add this recent tension to the past decade's "affirmative action bake sales," "ghetto parties," and Black-face demonstrations by White students at a variety of educational institutions

¹ In the fall of 2006 at a high school in Jena, LA, two Black students sat under a tree where white students typically spent time. Nooses were found hanging on the tree the next day, a sign of a racist slur toward Black students and the entire Black community. The white students who placed the nooses on the tree were put on temporary suspension from school. Later that semester, a white student used a racial epithet toward a group of Black students. Six Black students responded by beating up the white student, who suffered a concussion and bruises. The six students were put in jail immediately. Several protests have occurred to protest the jailing of the "Jena Six," including one of the largest civil rights demonstrations in several years occurring on September 20, 2007 ("Jena 6," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

² In reaction to the Jena Six 2007 protests, a noose was found on the door of a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College during the fall semester. The professor, an African American female, is known for her anti-racist writings including *Addressing Racism: Facilitating Cultural Competence in Mental Health and Educational Settings*. The incident was seen by the media and the Columbia University community as a direct protest against the civil rights demonstrations supporting the six Black high school students known as the "Jena Six". Several other nooses were found on educational campuses throughout the nation (Boxer 2007).

throughout the nation³. Furthermore, add this recent tension to the decades-long battle for and by people of color to receive the same quality education as Whites, including, but not limited to, the U.S. Supreme Court cases of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)⁴, *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950)⁵, and *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954)⁶. And the battle for people of color to receive the same quality of life as Whites is not only within the institution of education. This battle rages on, as it has since White Europeans first landed on the shores of the Americas, in all U.S. political, social, and economic institutions.

At a particular university in the south (from here on referred to as South Central University, or as “SCU”), its racial climate exemplifies the distress being felt nationwide by both administrations and, especially, students. In SCU’s particular state, the 22 million-person population consists of 43.5 percent Latina/o and Black constituents (*State and County Quick Facts* 2002). Interestingly however, SCU’s minority numbers have

³ “Affirmative Action Bake Sales” have occurred on campuses throughout the nation by white students in protest to affirmative action policies that they claim unfairly advantage students of color. Such bake sales have occurred on the campuses of UC-Berkeley, New York University, Texas A&M University, and many others. “Ghetto Parities” have occurred in college campus communities, typically on Martin Luther King Day, as a derogatory response to the Civil Rights hero’s celebration. They have occurred at the University of Texas at Austin, Clemson University, Dartmouth University, and many others. Black-face demonstrations by white students, echoing the Black-face minstrel shows of the 19th and early 20th century, have been seen on many college campuses including Auburn University, Oklahoma State University, and Union College in New York, NY, among others (“Affirmative Action Bake Sales,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

⁴ *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case in 1896 that initially upheld the doctrine of “separate but equal” (“Plessy v. Ferguson,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

⁵ *Sweatt v. Painter* was a U.S. Supreme Court case in 1950 that reversed the doctrine of “separate but equal” and allowed a Black student admission to the University of Texas Law School (“Sweatt v. Painter,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

⁶ *Brown v. the Board of Education* was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case in 1954 that affirmed that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” regarding public schools for white and Black students (“Brown v. the Board of Education,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

been fluctuating since the 1998 *Hopwood v. Texas*⁷ decision. As of fall 2007, Blacks (3.0 percent), Latina/os (11.3 percent), and Asian Americans (4.0 percent) were *18.4 percent* of the nearly 47,000 students attending the university (Enrollment Profile Spring 2007). There is a substantial difference between *43.5 percent* and *18.4 percent*.

With such worrying figures, how can SCU, and its fellow institutions around the nation, resolve the diversity dilemma as the above numbers demonstrate? Moreover, diversity is not just about numbers. It is about being in a hospitable environment where students are surrounded and respected by peers with an assortment of differing worldviews, experiences, residences, ethnicities, and ideologies; varieties of classes, genders, and races. Nevertheless, in many higher education institutions, students of color do not always feel welcome, as illustrated above. So, the questions arise: How can perceived hostile environments, as potentially found in historically White institutions of higher learning, attract *and* retain diverse racial minority scholars thereby making the environment hospitable and welcoming? Furthermore, and perhaps the root of the answer to the previous question, *what are the current and actual experiences of students of color in historically White institutions of higher learning?*

In this study, I investigate the reasons why racial minority undergraduate students at SCU choose to pursue higher education studies at this historically White university, despite the school's potential for diversity controversies, therefore creating a hostile environment. Specifically, I investigate what characteristics of both SCU and its

⁷ *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996) was a case taken to the 5th Circuit Court in an attempt by four white people who were denied acceptance to the University of Texas School of Law. They "challenged the institution's admission policy on equal protection grounds and prevailed" ("*Hopwood v. Texas*," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

students contribute to minority students' decisions to stay at this historically White institution. I also examine students' experiences, including attitudes toward diversity and any discrimination that they may experience in campus settings.

In doing so, this study adds a fresh yet imperative perspective to the complex issue of diversity: the opinions of students of color themselves. Doing so potentially leads to more positive answers and propositions for what administrations can do to increase the percentage of racial minority students by making institutions of higher education hospitable, welcoming, and advantageous for all students of color.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. Such an institution the South to-day sorely needs.

- W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 87

Originally published in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois' words echo well into the 21st Century, over 100 years since *The Souls of Black Folk* was written. In the same manuscript Du Bois initiates a conversation concerning racism in the United States, indicating that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (1997:3). This problem of the color-line, i.e., racism against minorities of color by the White majority, in the U.S. political, economic, and social system, remains today. Even further, it is well exemplified in the university, an institution that should otherwise "be the organ of that fine adjustment ... which forms the secret of civilization" (DuBois 1997:87).

Sociological literature regarding the contemporary state of race and education will be summarized in this chapter. In doing so, this chapter will begin with a dialogue between the theoretical frameworks for this thesis. The chapter will then discuss sociological studies investigating students of color in higher education and perceptions of educational institutions as hostile environments for students of color.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theories concerning U.S. racism exist in the sociological literature. Early racial and ethnic theories have examined the assimilation of racial and ethnic minorities into White mainstream society in the U.S. Most notably, Robert Park and Milton Gordon's theories on *assimilation* indicate that American racial/ethnic minorities experience several stages of assimilation until fully realizing mainstream status, e.g., White acceptance. While such theories linearly posit that third-generation immigrants to the U.S. are much more assimilated than their first-generation predecessors, they reflect a European bias. The theories were mainly focused on European immigration to the U.S., not Latina/o and Black citizens, which provide non-linear, or even non-existent, process of assimilation. That stated the following section will highlight more recent race and ethnic theories, including the *racial formation theory*, *systemic racism*, the *white racial frame*, and *color-blind racism*, as theoretical frameworks for this thesis.

Racial Formation Theory

A significant contemporary sociological race theory is Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *racial formation theory*. The theory refers to the social, economic, and political forces that "determine the constant and importance of racial categories" and "racial meanings," and suggests that race must be understood "as an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (Omi and Winant 1989:198). Race is viewed as a fluid identity that shifts depending on time and space within social institutions; it is not viewed as a static

biological trait, but rather as a constantly changing social construct. The *racial formation theory* is a useful framework for viewing the fluid role of race as it is experienced by students of color in the institutions of higher education; the experience of race and racism can fluctuate between person-to-person depending on social contexts, struggles, and identities.

Systemic Racism

Though race can be viewed as a fluid construct, situating race within the larger framework of history is fundamental. The concept of *systemic racism* is another essential frame that does just that; it is useful for understanding the contemporary crisis as it is a historically based frame of racism in the U.S. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva addresses this historical process of race by stating:

... when race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became 'White') over non-Europeans (the peoples who became 'non-White') (2003:9).

Here, Bonilla-Silva alludes to the history of White European colonization of Native Americans in the New World and, subsequently, the infamous slave trade between Europe, the Americas, and Africa beginning in the 17th century onward. Therefore, the U.S. history of race is *systemic* in that it has historic roots in the Americas as discriminately empowering one race, Whites, over all other races. From this historical frame, *systemic racism* in the U.S. is basically the explicit and implicit discrimination from White people toward people of color as demonstrated through deeply political, economic, social, and cultural inequalities in order to preserve White supremacy (Feagin and McKinney 2003, Feagin 2001, Pearl 2002).

The consequences of *systemic racism* remain in existence and are fully experienced today. White Americans remain privileged based on the racist framework established 400 years ago. And Americans of color remain at a disadvantage. As will be demonstrated, the higher education institution is a laboratory of *systemic racism* in action.

White Racial Frame

Given that race can be viewed as a fluid social construct while racism can be interpreted within institutionalized terms, the existence of racially based frameworks can be demonstrated in order to justify the status quo that racism encourages (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Even though all races have frameworks within which to view society, it is typically the racial frame of the majority race, in this case Whites, that is used to reference all other races in relation to the dominate race in power (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

I will refer to this framework of the dominate race as the *white racial frame*. The *white racial frame* is defined as “an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate” (Feagin 2006:25); or, in other words, as racial “common sense” (Omi and Winant 1989:202). Therefore, the *white racial frame* is a type of logic created and used by those in power, i.e., White people, to legitimize their dominance over people of color. The frame acts as a vantage point from where they interpret other races in subordinate positions; as a result, people of color also view society from this framework. Put differently, the *white racial frame* is a mechanism with which Whites maintain power over people of color.

One of the consequences of the *white racial frame* on people of color, specifically Black Americans, is brilliantly described by W.E.B. DuBois. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois portrays the concept of *double-consciousness* as:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two-souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1997: 8).

The *white racial frame* is the main framework of those in power and, therefore, the frame within which the rest of society lives. However, people of color have additional frames in order to understand and cope with the racist conditions, including this *double-consciousness*. *Double-consciousness* is basically a description of what it feels like to be on the receiving end of racism. It alludes to the dual identity of African Americans, though the concept can arguably be applied to other racial minority groups as well. People of color in this nation identify themselves as both Americans and as racial minorities. Their identities are based in both the perspective of how others, i.e., Whites, view them and how they view themselves; a *double-consciousness* from an outsider's point-of-view and from an insider's point-of-view.

Color-Blind Racism

Another theoretical framework in dialogue with those previously mentioned is *color-blind racism*. Rather than overt acts of racism as seen throughout the U.S. pre-Civil Rights Movement, *color-blind racism* is an “ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era” that maintains “white privilege

without fanfare” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:3). As outlined by Bonilla-Silva, *color-blind racism* is a framework within which individuals ostensibly socially interact under the assumption that we are living in a post-racial society beyond the racism of the nation’s foundation while, instead, still engaging in structural racism. Four significant frames construct *color-blind racism* including: 1) abstract liberalism –applying a type of liberalism maintaining “racially unfair situations,” 2) biologization of culture – rationalizing social statuses of minorities on cultural differences, 3) naturalization of racial matters – explaining inequalities as natural occurrences, and 4) minimization of race – structural racism is not seen as significant (Bonilla-Silva 2001:142). As will be demonstrated via student narratives, students of color interacted with White peers and professors who demonstrated at least one of these *color-blind racism* frameworks.

Literature Review

Students of Color in Higher Education

Existing sociological literature suggests a relationship between students of color and their experience at historically White colleges/universities. A few sociological studies have conducted qualitative and/or quantitative research with students of color as participants, indicating specific conditions for Latina/o, Black, and Asian American students.

Latina/o Students

Numerous political, economic, and social analysts agree that the current dilemma of Latina/os in secondary and higher education is of national concern. According to most sources, Latina/os are the least probable of White, Black, and Asian Americans to

attend a four-year college/university and much less attend advanced degree institutions. Latina/os are also known to have the highest dropout rates in both secondary and higher education, with no sign of these numbers decreasing. With that understood, this section will look at current sociological data regarding Latina/os in higher education.

In a 1997 study analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS), researchers found that Latina/os “have the lowest expectations for degree attainment among the four racial/ethnic groups” during their sophomore year of high school (Hurtado et al. 1997:50). Additionally, only 53 percent of Latina/o high school seniors indicated any likelihood to attend a four-year institution. Deepening the dilemma, Latina/os do not apply to as many universities as other students, and are the least likely to attend university immediately after high school (Hurtado et al. 1997). These findings confirm the apprehension and alarm of political, economic, and social analysts as previously mentioned.

In a study on possible Latina/o preferences to live at home during college and how that affects their educational prospects, Matthew Desmond and Ruth N. Lopez Turley (2007) employ data from the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project (THEOP). Their analysis confirms that Latina/o high school seniors in Texas were most likely to give importance to living at home during college (Desmond and Turley 2007). However, though there are several understandable reasons for attending university near families, the challenges are significant. For example, access to prestigious colleges/universities, even in some cases *four-year* colleges/universities, may be limited

depending on one's geographical area. Coinciding with this predicament, Desmond and Turley cite D. Karen and Samuel Peng respectively who found that relative to Asian and White students who attend four-year universities, Latina/o students are less likely to attend prestigious colleges and universities (Desmond and Turley 2007). More interestingly, those Latina/o students who did attend four-year institutions were more likely to drop out "with an attrition rate of 34%, a rate that far outpaces that of Blacks (29%), Whites (25%), and Asians (14%) (Peng 1988)" (Desmond and Turley 2007:2).

Even when Latina/o students do attend a four-year university, their retention rates are significantly lower than their Black, White, and Asian peers. This, again, confirms the political, social, and economic quandary. Indeed, the question remains: *what* are Latina/o students experiencing at educational institutions which may or may not contribute to their desire to leave these institutions?

A campus climate national survey was conducted among Latina/o college sophomores and juniors demonstrating the impact Latina/o students felt from campus' racist environments. The study indicated that Latina/o students who *perceived* themselves as being less academically competent were more likely to experience and feel racism in their surroundings (Hurtado 1994). Whether or not the students really did have lower grades is unknown. However, they seemingly have a higher sensitivity to the racial climate.

Several studies have been conducted concerning the University of California system. One study in particular investigated both how Latina/os entered into and their involvement within the university system. The study concludes, simply, that the

Latina/o experience in the University of California system “remains a significant challenge” (Garcia and Figueroa 2002:47). The struggle, unlike in the previously mentioned study, is apparently not related to academic performance but rather to breaking through social barriers and seclusion while both networking and persevering (Garcia and Figueroa 2002). Similar to other racial groups, Latina/os have the double-burden of performing both academically and socially as well as every other student on campus, Whites included, while at the same time persevering through the trauma of racism. This is a burden White students do not have to manage. This idea, though it is briefly discussed here, will be further highlighted in an upcoming section when discussing Wendy Leo Moore’s idea of *emotional labor*.

Focusing on gender, Heidi Barajas and Jennifer L. Pierce (2001) investigated the gender differences between Latina and Latino college students and how that affects their higher education experience. According to their study, Latinas successfully deal with negative stereotypes by both emphasizing their membership in a group, e.g. *a Latina community*, and by maintaining positive self definitions (Barajas and Pierce 2001). On the contrary, the authors found that Latino men had less positive racial and ethnic identities compared to their female counterparts (Barajas and Pierce 2001). Though my study does not explicitly focus on gender differences, the fact that experiences differ between genders is worth briefly mentioning.

In addition to the above mentioned studies on Latina/os in higher education, two studies focus on Latina/o experiences in secondary education. Angela Valenzuela (1997) conducted a three-year ethnographic study, using both quantitative and

qualitative methods focusing on Mexican immigrant and Mexican American students in Houston, Texas. She found that for Mexican and Mexican American students “schooling is a subtractive process” (Valenzuela 1999:3) disinvesting students from social and cultural capital leading to low educational success. Instead of this *subtractive* practice, Valenzuela (1999) calls for an *additive* practice where Latina/o students are given the potential to succeed. Similarly, Harriet D. Romo and Toni Falbo (1996) conducted a four-year longitudinal study, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of 100 at-risk Latina/o high school youth in Austin, Texas. Their study highlights the systemic reasons for the large Latina/o high school dropout rate and adds the personal perspective of Latina/o high school students themselves. Challenging the current educational system to provide substantially better accommodations to Latina/o students, seven recommendations are listed including: 1) putting the learning of students first, 2) clarifying scholastic standards, 3) preventing student failure, 4) making participation in schoolwork rewarding, 5) emphasizing hard work, 6) making schools accessible, and 7) creating clear pathways to good outcomes (1996:219). Both of these studies creatively highlight the outrageously high dropout rates of Latina/o youth by providing a voice to Latina/o high school students. Doing so gives a much more accurate account of the emotions, ambitions, and struggles of Latina/os prior to entering, or not entering, higher education. Also, and quite importantly, both studies call for further research and investigation on the Latina/o experience within the education system, alluding to the lack of appropriate student-voiced data.

Black Students

The history of Black students in higher education is much different from that of Latina/o students; however, the experience of racism remains similarly felt. Though the current education experience of Black Americans is not as politically, socially, and economically discussed as an up-to-date hot-topic issue, the actual experiences of Black students in education *should be* of national concern. Even when Black students attend integrated institutions, they “receive an inferior education compared to Whites” (Bonilla-Silva 2003:2) due to the systemically racist structure of the institution.

In the previously mentioned study analyzing data from the NELS and BPS, researchers found that 60 percent of Black high school seniors indicated that they planned on attending a four-year institution (Hurtado et al. 1997). Though the percentage of Black students indicating their likelihood to attend university is higher than that of Latina/o students, the number is still alarmingly low. *Forty percent* do not intend to go to a four-year university⁸.

Thus, what do Black students experience when they do attend a university, particular a historically White university? Joe R. Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Nikitah Imani’s (1996) qualitative study investigated Black students and parents from a historically White state university. Highlighting a failure in traditionally White universities, the authors suggest that integration has “been designed as a one-way assimilation process in which Black students are forced to adapt to White views, norms, and practices” (Feagin et al. 1996:xi). Black and other minority students have been

⁸ Interestingly, however, about 38 percent of White students do not intend to pursue college studies (Hurtado et al. 1997).

forced to integrate to the White culture while White students have not assimilated to minority cultures. Feagin et al. (1996) also suggest that White university officials have traditionally provided modest commitments to the retention of racial/ethnic minority students and that White analysts of post-secondary education frequently “downplay the role of White racism within predominately White colleges and universities,” generating obstacles for students of color (1996:136). This study recommends including the voices of Black students and parents to help solve the obstacles as part of the solution (Feagin et al. 1996).

At the University of Pennsylvania focus-groups examined the effects of racial stereotyping on the relationships between Black and White students (Torres and Charles 2004). Torres and Charles (2004) found that Black students correctly labeled the racial stereotypes their White peers used towards, or rather *against*, them. This ability to correctly label the racial stereotypes used against one’s self manifests W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of *double-consciousness* as discussed in the theoretical framework. Black students exert an incredible amount of energy in attempting to debunk myths regarding the supposed intellectual inferiority of their race (Torres and Charles 2004). This double-burden is quite similar to the previously mentioned Latina/o student experience in having to perform just as well as White students while also coping with, *and* fighting against, racist people and structures. Again, the concept of *emotional labor* that details this well will be discussed below.

Using focus groups and interviews with Black football players at a historically White university in the Midwest, John N. Singer (2005) discovered that Black students

were treated differently from their White peers. The Black athlete students in his study were denied, among other things, access to leadership roles. Likewise, they were denied opportunities to make major decisions regarding college and professional sports (Singer 2005). Complimentary to Singer's study, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok's (1998) quantitative study focused on the benefits of affirmative action, indicating that Black respondents felt that their educational institutions provided less emphasis to the racial/ethnic diversity of their schools than White respondents believed. In other words, White students felt that diversity was discussed quite often, while Black respondents believed that diversity was not addressed justly by the university administration.

In contrast to these two investigations, two different studies focused on the importance of networks. Studying the experiences of Black female graduate students at a major research university, Juanita Johnson-Bailey (2004) found that significant mentoring, a community and network with other students of color, professorial respect, and consistent funding all contributed to success for Black female graduate students. Additionally, a qualitative study among 55 college-educated Black Americans also emphasized the significance of social networks by stating:

... because so many alumni mention the importance of friendships with other Black students, it is probable that the numerically larger minority community attenuates alienation on a predominately White campus (Willie 2003:76).

Both studies encourage students of color to network with each other, faculty, and staff in order to both survive and counter the alienation and racism felt at historically white colleges/universities. As we will see in Chapter V, social and professional networks are essential to the retention of students of color in higher education.

Asian American Students

The sociological literature is significantly lacking for Asian Americans, especially in comparison with their Latina/o and Black student counterparts. Obviously, the need for further studies on the experience of Asian American students is desperately needed. However, described here are two studies focusing on the experiences of Asian Americans within *systemic racism*.

According to the 1997 study analyzing data from the NELS and the BPS, already mentioned twice above, 42 percent of Asian American high school sophomores and 75 percent of Asian American high school seniors expected to attend college, the highest percentages of the three minority groups (Hurtado et al. 1997). Therefore, the expectations of and for Asian Americans to attend and to do well in higher education is significantly higher and more stable than their Latina/o and Black peers.

However, Stacy J. Lee (2006) admittedly stresses that the term ‘Asian American’ describes an extremely diverse set of people with varying complexities and experiences, despite being labeled as the model minority. Because of this complex diversity, it is imperative to begin understanding the variety and intersections of identities within the Asian American community (Lee 2006).

A recent study that documents the extreme discrimination that Asian Americans face begins an understanding of these complexities and intersections. Using more than 40 in-depth interviews with Asian Americans, Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin (2008) find that Asian Americans experience racism in all U.S. institutions, including

educational settings. The study found that Asian Americans are forced to either adopt or actively resist the *white racial frame* and its consequences (Chou and Feagin 2008).

All Students of Color: Stigma and White Institutional Space

Given the above literature on Latina/o, Black, and Asian American students as individual groups, the following will describe experiences similarly felt by *all* groups of color in college/university settings. Particularly, issues of *stigma* and *white institutionalized space* will be discussed.

In *Campus Life*, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (1987) captures social-historical glimpses into the college outsiders of the late-19th the early-20th centuries by tracing how they have coped with racism and other forms of persecution. Students base their choices of post-secondary education on affordability, reputation of the school, and on their own social position (e.g., their parent's income, race, gender, et cetera). Once in higher education, students eventually ask themselves, "Where do I fit?" (Horowitz 1987:17). Today, students of color continue to exist as the present-day "new outsiders" (Horowitz 1987:262), despite Horowitz's comment that "contemporary students are . . . more alike today than different" (Horowitz 1987:64).

A Texas A&M University campus climate study discovered that students of color were unsatisfied with their collegiate experience compared to their White peers (Hurtado et al. 1998). Specifically, African American students were significantly less satisfied with campus diversity than any other racial group (Hurtado et al. 1998). However, the majority of undergraduates from all groups demonstrated overall satisfaction with Texas

A&M University, with a 97 percent majority indicating they would finish their degree at the institution (Hurtado et al. 1998).

According to a 1986 study, the problems facing students of color in higher education include higher college dropout rates, lower levels of academic preparation in high school, lower socioeconomic status, and a greater alienation or isolation from the White environment (Loo and Rolison 1986). Many students of color are aware of these educational statistics and experiences within their respective races, leading many to feel racially *stigmatized*. A few studies address the consequences of stigma for students of color. For many Black and Latina/o students, low academic achievement is related to racial stigmatization whereas stigmatization is rarely obvious in White and Asian American students (Brown and Lee 2005). Additionally, stigma may be strongly related to being a token-minority in an otherwise White-dominated academic setting (Niemann and Dovidio 1998). More specifically, Elizabeth C. Pinel, Leah R. Warner, and Poh-Pheng Chua (2005) found that stigmatized male students of color had lower grade-point averages and experienced academic disengagement and that stigmatized female students of color reported lower self-esteem.

As highlighted, many students of color in predominately White institutions are seen by their White peers as token minorities since many of them are in classrooms and other social settings with very few other students of color. Being one of only a few racial minorities can consequently “draw an inordinate amount of attention to one’s [school] performance” (Feagin and McKinney 2003:56). This leads toward even greater stigmatization as a person of color with an intense pressure to perform well

academically. Sadly, managing racism by trying to completely avert stigmatization is not only impossible, but is also detrimental to life-satisfaction and self-esteem (Feagin and McKinney 2003).

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and the National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, as cited by Gail E. Thomas, indicated several stress and conflict conditions often felt by students of color on historically White college campuses. Conditions included White ignorance about races and ethnicities and alienation and stereotyping of racial and ethnic minorities (Thomas 1997:5). These conditions fit perfectly into the *white racial frame* in order to perpetuate *systemic racism*.

In a qualitative study focusing on the experiences of Black students at historically White law schools, Wendy Leo Moore (2007) develops the concept of *white institutional space*. She describes the term as an “analytical tool” (2007:14) to call out White privilege and racism within the physical space of historically White educational institutions. She states that:

White institutional space of elite law schools has as its foundation a history and legacy of White racist exclusion of people of color. Not only did this result in the White accumulation of economic and political power reaped from these institutions, but it also permitted an exclusively White construction of the norms, values, and ideological frameworks that organize these institutions (2007: 27).

When students of color observe White founding fathers and alumni of the institution plastered on university walls, among several other physical manifestations, the students are automatically cued that they may not fit into this personification of the *white racial frame*.

Regarding the affects of *white institutionalized space* on students of color, Moore discusses the concept of *emotional labor*. Her observation is that students of color have the same normal intense pressures as White students in an educational setting. However, this pressure for students of color is coupled with the stresses of experiencing racism and discrimination based on their racial identity. The amount of time and energy – physically, mentally, and emotionally – to cope with hatred and ignorance while jointly doing everything else required of a student regardless of skin-color is quite considerable, to say the least (Moore 2007).

Finally, a three-year ethnographic study of predominately Latina/o, but also Asian American, Black students, and White students at a historically White college/university demonstrated how the students validated their personal experiences through journal writing and class participation (Padilla 1997). As students began to understand their personal experiences as either students of color or as White students, they also became aware of how their personal experiences fit into the larger *systemically racist* society. In the words of the researcher, the students were “awakened to a critical consciousness that would not accept their prior uninformed experience” (Padilla 1997).

Environments of Hostility

In the *Nineteenth Annual Status Report* of “Minorities in Higher Education” (American Council on Education 2001-2002), Sara Melendez states, “the current climate is not a very hospitable one for continued progress” (2002:7). Highlighting her statement, the Federal Bureau of Investigations released a hate crimes report on November 19, 2007. The report stated that of the 7,720 hate crimes that occurred in

2006, 51.8 percent were motivated by racial bias, and that *12.2 percent* of the 7,720 reported hate crimes *occurred on college and school campuses* (FBI National Press Office 2007). This blatant racism and hatred found on educational campuses can significantly affect a student of color's mental, physical, and social health "which can affect one's level of success in a variety of endeavors" (Feagin and McKinney 2003:33-34). Though students are directly affected, it is ultimately the entirety of U.S. society that experiences significant losses for the perpetuation of an unjust racist system (Feagin and McKinney 2003).

As Howard Schuman et al. report, "racial change has always involved some element of conflict and resistance" (Schuman et al. 1997:211). One reason for a hostile environment is that U.S. society remains highly segregated with many middle-upper-class Whites living a substantial amount of their lives with very little contact with middle-upper-class African Americans, let alone African Americans in poverty and/or African American elites (Feagin and McKinney 2003:10). The same can probably be said for the lack of relationships between Whites and other people of color as well. Gail E. Thomas echoes a similar statement, though specifically within education:

... decreasing availability of aid; limited respect, knowledge and tolerance for racial and cultural differences; and the first-time encounter of assertive minority and majority students in higher education – may very well explain the recent increase in conflict and racial disturbance on college campuses (1997: 2).

In other words, as a consequence of a still racially segregated society, relatively few encounters between White students and students of color occur before they enter higher education. This lack of previous encounters, compounded with competition for financial

and academic resources, creates a climate of hostility for students of color based on White racism. Since universities are where many White students interact with people of color for the first time, explicit racism is bound to occur (Willie 2003). Unfortunately, most incidents of White racism are not reported (Hurtado et al. 1998), perhaps due to conceptions of university personnel and administrators by students of color. Students of color may feel that college/university officials, who are predominately White, will not fully understand and/or agree that students of color experience racist acts in their college/university settings.

Additional factors have been found as contributors to negative campus climates including: a majority-White student population surrounded by a majority-White community, weakness in diversity training and curriculum among university administrators and leaders, and limited proposals toward dialogue between White students and students of color (Farrell and Jones 1988). Another factor specifically regarding Latina/o students in particular are misconceptions about current immigration issues and erroneous attempts by White students to label all Latina/o students as recent immigrants from Latin America. These misconceptions can potentially breed environments filled with anti-Latina/o sentiment and hatreds (Desmond and Turley 2007).

Summary

InsideHigherEd.Com recently published an article suggesting that “members of underrepresented minority groups badly lag behind their White ... peers in [going to college]” (Lederman 2007). According to the report, 31.8 percent of Black Americans

and 24.7 percent of Latina/os were enrolled in college. Couple these percentages with the above statements regarding environments of hostility, it is imperative to explore and understand the conditions of minority students in higher education, specifically at historically White colleges/universities (Thomas 1997).

As demonstrated by the above literature, or lack thereof, a considerable amount of research and literature is still needed to completely understand the varied experiences of students of color on educational campuses, in this case at historically White colleges/universities. Hurtado poignantly state that:

... additional evidence is needed about the conditions and practical interventions within diverse educational settings that result in preparing individuals for an increasingly diverse workplace ... a deeper understanding of campus diversity will be attained when researchers understand how diversity affects the different groups and even subgroups within our society (Hurtado 2005, p. 596).

Our society is not holistically addressing historic injustices while also not holistically meeting present and future needs. All the while, university graduates of all colors enter into the political, economic, and social sector by the thousands each year (Pearl 2002, Romo and Falbo 1996, Desmond and Turley 2007). Ironically, higher education has both the double-burden and the dual-responsibility of leading racial reconciliation by reducing racism and creating diverse communities of scholarship (Thomas 1997), a process within which the voices of students of color should be central. However, the question remains, *what are students of color experiencing* at educational institutions? Hopefully, my research study, guided by the previously discussed theoretical frameworks, will provide an additional voice to the experiences of students of color at historically White colleges/universities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose, Strategy, and Data

In light of the referenced literature, this study investigates the experiences of undergraduate students at South Central University (SCU) who self-identify as racial minorities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the actual experiences of students of color at a historically White university. As stated in Chapter I, by investigating students of color, a testimonial voice can be given to minority students which, relayed, could potentially empower students of color.

In order to conduct the investigation, I utilize the often-neglected “third research paradigm” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004): mixed methods research. Therefore, my study strategy is both qualitative and quantitative. In their quantitative study “Racial Diversity Reconsidered,” Stanly Rothman et al. state, “in evaluating the consequences of diversity policies on campus life, it is very difficult to ... collect data that have concrete measurable correlates” (2003:29). This study takes the risk and attempts to provide concise testimonials using mixed methods.

The quantitative portion of the study uses a database I created from surveying students at SCU. Students volunteered to be surveyed via recruitment by snowball sampling in classroom settings, organizations, and the multicultural service office. There were 311 respondents including 57 Black students, 172 Latina/o students, and 58 Asian American students. Twenty-four students identified as “Other” and no student identified as Native American. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the 24

responses of “Other” were dropped leaving 287 respondents identified as Black, Latina/o, and Asian American.

The qualitative portion of the study consists of 17 semi-structured interviews that took place over a span of three years with undergraduate students at SCU who self-identify as Hispanic/Latina/o. Students volunteered via recruitment by snowball sampling. Some of the students were acquaintances and others were recruited in classroom and organizational settings, including SCU’s multicultural services office. When students filled out the survey, the last question asked, “Would you be interested in voicing any further comments and/or concerns regarding this survey and/or issues of diversity at SCU?” (1 – Yes, 2 – No). A space was provided for students to leave their contact information. Once surveys were collected after each distribution, I then contacted the students who self-identified as Hispanic/Latina/o, answered YES to the question, and provided their contact information. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. They were conducted mainly in SCU’s student union; however, a few interviews were conducted at off-campus coffee shops in order to accommodate student schedules. The students are both male and female, range in age from 19 through 23, and represented a variety of campus majors and involvement. All of the students were upperclassmen; no freshman participated in the study. Hurtado et al. suggest that “educational research across racial/ethnic groups within the context of inequality becomes quite complex as statistical controls assume in a model that ‘all things are equal’ when, in fact, they are not” (1997:63). Therefore, I focused solely on Latina/o

students for the qualitative portion, since Latina/o, Black, and Asian American students have somewhat difference experiences, as the literature demonstrates⁹.

Since the interviews and surveys involved current university students, the data collected are pertinent tools to understand the experiences of contemporary undergraduate students of color. However, there are a few disadvantages to this data since the method for collecting the interviews and surveys was snowball sampling. First, not all undergraduate racial minority students had an equal chance of being selected for this study. Second, snowball sampling risks selecting respondents with similar experiences and viewpoints. Generalizability, therefore, will be restricted (Nardi 2003). Third, particularly for the quantitative methodology, since the students who participated in this study self-identified as racial minorities, and since the race categories were broad (i.e., 1 = African American/Black, 2 = Hispanic/Latina/o, 3 = Asian/Asian American), it is possible that many student experiences differ depending on racial subcategories. For example, the experience of a Mexican American or Korean American student versus a Cuban American or Thai student may differ dramatically, though they both self-identify in the broad categories of “Hispanic/Latina/o” or “Asian/Asian American” respectively.

⁹ Of the 287 students who participated in the survey, a total of 71 students, or 24.7 percent, indicated interest to participate in a discussion regarding SCU and diversity. Approximately 67.6 percent who indicated interest were Latina/o while 18.3 percent were Black and 14.1 percent were Asian American. Additionally, 46.3 percent of the 71 students who indicated interest in participating in a discussion experienced discrimination by their White peers.

Quantitative Hypotheses and Qualitative Assumptions

Quantitative Hypotheses

The quantitative portion of the mixed methodology is used for investigational purposes. Though investigational, I drew on the previously mentioned literature and hypothesized the following:

- 1) *Racial minority students from urban areas are more likely to experience discrimination often based on their race by other students.* This hypothesis is based on literature suggesting that while students of color are often times familiar with interacting with White people *and* with diverse environments, White students' often lack interaction with people of color; therefore, racist activities are likely to occur when the two racial groups initially interact (Thomas 1997; Feagin and McKinney 2003)¹⁰. For that reason, students from more urban environments, where the population exceeds 500,000 people, may feel more discomfort than students from less urban environments, since they are now potentially interacting with White students who are not familiar with diversity. Given that SCU is a more racially homogenous environment, students of color acquainted with racial diversity in their hometowns may find more discomfort in a less diverse setting and may be more likely to experience discrimination.
- 2) *Racial minority students with higher Grade Point Ratios are less likely to experience discrimination often based on their race by other students.* This hypothesis is based on literature suggesting that Latina/o students who perceive

¹⁰ Refer to Chapter II for this literature reference.

themselves as less academically capable are more likely to experience racism (Hurtado 1994)¹¹.

- 3) *Racial minority students whose fathers obtained higher levels of education are less likely to experience discrimination - often based on race – on the part of other students. Racial minority students whose mothers obtained higher levels of education are less likely to experience discrimination - often based on race - on the part of other students.* These hypotheses are exploring potentially-existing relationships between parents' levels-of-education and whether or not their children experience racism and are based on literature describing the highly segregated settings of higher educational institutions where relationships between minority and majority races may not be fully established (Thomas 1997). Students of color who have parents with higher education degrees may be more accustomed to interacting with white people; therefore, they may not experience discrimination to the same degree, or in the same way, as students of color who are experiencing a homogenous white setting for the first time in their young lives.
- 4) *Black students are more likely than Asian American students to experience discrimination - often based on their race - on the part of other students. In turn, Latina/o students are also more likely than Asian American students to experience discrimination - often based on their race - on the part of other students.* Asian American students will be my comparison group for the purpose

¹¹ Refer to Chapter II for this literature reference.

of this study; further analysis of the reason Asian Americans were chosen as the comparison group will be explained in Chapter IV which focuses on the quantitative analysis. This hypothesis is based on literature suggesting low retention rates of Latina/o and Black students in higher education; in comparison, Asian Americans had high retention rates (Hurtado et al. 1997). Perhaps the low retention rates among Latina/o and Black students can be explained with any discrimination students of color, particularly Latina/o and Black students, experience in university/college settings.

Therefore, my independent variables for the quantitative portion of the study include race, size of hometown, Grade Point Ratio (GPR), and father and mother's education. My dependent variable is how often students of color experienced discrimination based on their race. This variable was measured as an ordinal variable by asking the students to indicate how often their White peers treated them differently from other students because of their race/ethnicity. The optional answers were: never, almost never, seldom, sometimes, often, almost always, and always.

In order to conduct the study, I am utilizing ordered logistic regression. Ordered logistic regression is "used to estimate relationships between an ordinal dependent variable and a set of independent variables" (Poston 2007). An ordinal variable is both categorical and ordered. For example, a respondent may indicate that their GPA or health is "poor", or "good", or "excellent" thereby not indicating the differences in distances between "poor," "good," or "excellent" but just the status of their GPA or health (Poston 2007). Since my dependent variable, how often racial minority students

experience discrimination from other students, is both categorical and ordered and has three or more categories, ordered logistic regression is the best test for this study. The dependent variable is measured in ordered categories (7 categories, from 1 “never” to 4 “sometimes” to 7 “always”). Thus, there are seven outcomes for the dependent variable.

My specific methodology for three of my four hypotheses (concerning size of hometown, GPR, and father/mother’s education level) is ordered logistic regression since the dependent variable is both categorical and ordered and the independent variables are interval variables. Size of hometown is measured in interval categories of population of hometown (7 categories, from 1 “very small town (less than 2,500 people)” to 7 “major urban center (1,000,001 or more)”). GPR is measured in intervals of points (6 interval categories, from 1 “less than 2.0” to 6 “4.0”). Father’s education is measured in interval categories of educational attainment (9 categories, from 1 “none” to 6 “some college” to 9 “other”). Mother’s education is measured in the same way.

My specific methodology for my fourth hypothesis (likelihood of Black and Latina/o students, in comparison to Asian American students, to experience discrimination based on their race on the part of other students) is an ordered logistic regression. The dependent variable is both categorical and ordered and the independent variables are nominal/categorical. Race, in this case, is going to be measured as a series of dummy variable(s) (for the Black dummy variable: scored 1 if the student is Black, 0 if not; for the Latina/o dummy variable: scored 1 if the student is Latina/o, 0 if not; et cetera.).

Qualitative Assumptions

The qualitative portion of the mixed methodology is to investigate and deepen the understanding of students of color. Therefore, no specific hypotheses have been formulated, since the interviews were exploratory in nature. However, I did conduct the interviews with the basic assumption that Latina/os experienced the distress of discrimination of some sort on campus, survived the distress by forming communities, and to prove to themselves and their home communities that they can survive and succeed in a predominately White environment.

CHAPTER IV

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

As mentioned in the Chapters I and III, this chapter will preliminarily highlight quantitative data gathered from students at South Central University (SCU) who self-identified as Latina/o, Black, or Asian American. Though it is a brief and preliminary perspective on the survey data, it provides an overview of the experiences of Latina/o, Black, and Asian American students. It also provides a segway into to the qualitative analysis, the main sustenance of this project.

Table 1 describes in detail the variables used in this study, specifically the mean, standard deviation, and the minimum and maximum values of the independent variables:

Table 1
Descriptive Data:
Student Respondents to the SCU Survey who Experienced
Discrimination from Other Students in the Student Body

<u>VARIABLES</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>MIN</u>	<u>MAX</u>
<u>Dependent Variables</u>				
Discrimination Experienced	3.073	1.399	1	7
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
Size of Hometown	4.965	1.971	1	7
GPR	3.461	1.056	0	6
<i>Parent's Education</i>				
Father's Ed.	4.905	2.411	1	9
Mother's Ed.	4.594	2.168	1	9
<i>Race</i>				
Black	0.199	0.399	0	1
Latina/o	0.599	0.491	0	1
Asian American	0.202	0.402	0	1
<i>N</i> = 287				

The following further describes the variables specifically regarding the relationship between races and how often discrimination is experienced:

- 1) 5.3 percent of **Black students** never experience discrimination, 5.3 percent almost never, 15.8 percent seldom experience discrimination, 43.9 percent sometimes, 24.6 percent often, 1.7 percent almost always, and 3.5 percent always experience discrimination based on race;
- 2) 21.8 percent of **Latina/o students** never experience discrimination, 21.2 percent almost never, 21.8 percent seldom, 24.7 percent sometimes, 8.8 percent almost often, 0.6 percent almost always, and 1.9 percent always experience discrimination based on race;
- 3) 17.2 percent of **Asian American students** never experience discrimination, 22.4 percent almost never, 25.9 percent seldom, 25.9 percent sometimes, 6.9 percent often, 1.7 percent almost always, and zero percent always experience discrimination based on race.

These descriptive results indicate that Black students experience the greatest amount of discrimination. Twenty eight percent of Black students experience discrimination more often compared to Latina/o (10.6 percent) and Asian American (8.6 percent) students.

The following table demonstrates the results of another preliminary model for Black and Latina/o students. It summarizes the effects of size of hometown, GPR, parent's education, and race on how often discrimination is experienced.

Table 2
Ordered Logistic Regression of Likelihood of Respondents
to the SCU Dataset Experiencing Discrimination from Other Students in the Student Body

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>ologit Coefficient</u>	<u>z-score</u>
Size of Hometown	0.124*	2.14
GPR	-0.010	-0.92
<i>Parent's Education</i>		
Father's Ed	-0.025	-0.45
Mother's Ed	0.072	1.22
<i>Race</i>		
Black	1.349***	3.63
Latina/o	-0.032	-0.11
N	263	
LR Chi-Square	34.89	
Pseudo R-Square	0.0398	
Log Likelihood	-420.4	
Prob > Chi-Square	0.0000	
* = p < 0.05 ; ** = p < 0.01 ; *** p < 0.000		

Table 2 demonstrates the likelihood ratio chi-square of 34.89 with a p-value of 0.0000 which indicates that the model as a whole is statistically significant. It also shows the coefficients, the z-scores, and whether or not the variables are statistically significant. Both size of hometown and the Black category are statistically significant, but parents' education (father's and mother's), grade point ratio, and the Latina/o category are not statistically significant.

Brief Explanation

During preliminary investigations of the effects of the three main racial categories (Black, Latina/o, and Asian American) on discrimination experienced, three

separate ordered logistic regressions were used to determine the specific effects of the race categories on the dependent variable. After analyzing the three models, it was found that the independent variables “Black” and “Latina/o” have a statistically significant effect on discrimination experienced¹². However, the independent variable “Asian American” did not¹³. The preliminary investigation models are summarized in this following table as supplemental information:

Table 3
Supplemental Ordered Logistic Regression Results:
Three Models Testing Individual Significance of
Race Categories on Discrimination Felt

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Model 1</u> (Black)	<u>Model 2</u> (Latina/o)	<u>Model 3</u> (Asian)
Size of Hometown	0.125*	0.119*	0.164**
GPR	-0.963	-0.211	-0.118
<i>Parent’s Education</i>			
Father’s Ed	-0.234	-0.475	-0.012
Mother’s Ed	0.0713	0.092	0.095
<i>Race</i>			
Black	1.373***		
Latina/o		-0.727**	
Asian American			-0.339
N	263	263	263
LR Chi-Square	34.88	21.47	13.62
Pseudo R-Square	0.0398	0.0245	0.0156
Log Likelihood	-420.4	-427.1	-431.0
Prob > Chi-Square	0.0000	0.0007	0.0182
* = p < 0.05 ; ** = p < 0.01 ; *** p < 0.000			

¹² In Table 2, the “Latina/o” category was not significantly different from the “Asian American” category. However, the analysis for Table 2 was conducted *after* the analysis for Table 3. The analysis for Table 2 combined the variables in one analysis; the analysis for Table 3 conducted three separate analyses.

¹³ Since the independent variable “Asian American” does not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable “discrimination experienced,” specifically for Table 3’s analyses, the variable “Asian American” is used as the comparison dummy variable to the variables “Black” and “Latina/o.”

Hypotheses Supported

Two of the five hypotheses were supported in the multivariate analysis. These are discussed below.

Size of Hometown

My original hypothesis regarding size of hometown was the following: *Racial minority students from urban areas are more likely to experience discrimination often based on their race by other students.* The results show support for this hypothesis.

Given the statistical significance, we can say the following about the independent variable “size of hometown”: Given that all other variables in the model are held constant, a one unit increase in size of hometown (going from 1 to 7) is associated with a 0.124 increase in the log odds of experiencing discrimination experienced, given all of the other variables in the model are held constant, is expected. Again, this coefficient is significant, $z = 2.14$ ($z > 2.00$) and $p = 0.032$ ($p < 0.05$).

Further examination in odds, standard deviation, and percent odds solidifies the strength between size of hometown and discrimination experienced often. In doing so, it can be stated that: 1) For every increase in a category of size of hometown, the odds of experiencing discrimination more often are 1.13 greater, holding all other variables constant. 2) For every one standard deviation increase in a category of size of hometown, there is an increase of 0.24 in the log odds (i.e., the logit) of experiencing discrimination more often, holding all other variables constant. 3) For every increase in a category of size of hometown, the odds of experiencing discrimination more frequently increase by 13.2 percent, holding all other variables constant.

Black Students

My original hypothesis regarding racial membership was the following: *Black students are more likely than Asian American students to experience discrimination often based on their race by other students.* The results support this hypothesis. Given the statistical significance of the Black racial category we can say the following: A one unit increase in the Black racial category (going from 0 to 1) is associated with a 1.349 increase in the log odds of experiencing discrimination, given that all of the other variables in the model are held constant, is expected. Again, this coefficient is significant, $z = 3.53$ ($z > 2.00$) and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$).

Further examination in odds and percent odds solidifies the strength between size of Black racial membership and discrimination experienced often (we cannot examine standard deviation since the variable “Black” is a dummy variable (Poston, Lecture 8:28)). In doing so, it can be stated that: 1) Black students are about 3.85 times more likely to experience discrimination more often than Asian American students, holding all other variables constant. 2) Black students have odds of experiencing discrimination more frequently that are 285.3 percent greater than those of Asian-American students, holding all other variables constant.

Finally, three of the five hypotheses were not supported. Thus, the results show that parent’s education, grade point ratio, and being Latina/o were not significantly associated with the likelihood of experiencing discrimination.

Summary

The results of the ordered logistic regression demonstrate that only size of hometown and self-identifying as Black have a statistically significant effect on how often discrimination is experienced. Therefore, the two hypotheses associated with these variables are supported in the analysis. However, my original hypotheses regarding GPR, parent's education, and self-identifying as Latina/o are not supported.

Given this preliminary quantitative data, I will now shift the focus from all students of color to Latina/o students specifically.

CHAPTER V

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity?

- Cesar Chavez (Think Exist 2006)

Cesar Chavez' ideal vision as described above exemplifies the goal of many educators and students in higher education. This ideal vision is reiterated even in South Central University's (SCU) Commitment to Diversity that states:

Diversity is an indispensable component of academic excellence. A commitment to diversity means a commitment to the inclusion, welcome, and support of individuals from all groups, encompassing the various characteristics of persons in our community ... As we harness the power of diversity, we will provide students, faculty, and staff a university experience rich in perspectives and opportunities to learn from each other (2006).

But is this ideal vision truly the case or merely a utopian delusion from academia's ivory towers or grassroots activists' agendas? Who better to find out than those whom initiatives toward diversity impact the most: the students themselves, specifically, students of color?

In this chapter, the qualitative findings of the research will be discussed. It will begin by discussing the racial climate at SCU including its racial history and present circumstances as framed within America's history of *systemic racism*. Following will be a discussion of the three major trends found in interviews with students who self-identified as Latina/o:

1) *The reasons why Latinas/os choose to attend SCU, a historically White university.* Specifically, the focus will be on affordability, its proximity to their hometowns, and the reputation of SCU.

2) *The actual experiences of Latinas/os at SCU, as a historically White university.* Specifically, it will focus on their attitudes to the small minority population of the student body, any discriminatory acts they may have experienced as students including gender differences, and any considerations they may have given to transferring to other universities.

3) *The reasons Latina/os choose to remain at SCU, as a historically White university even if they may perceive it as a hostile environment.* Specifically, it will focus on students' feelings toward making a difference at SCU and proving to themselves that they can survive the environment, characteristics of the university that they enjoy, and any mentor experiences.

The chapter will then conclude with a summary of the qualitative findings.

Setting of SCU

Some refer to SCU as “the Harvard of the South” as it is known for its attraction of numerous valedictorians, salutatorians, and National Merit Scholars from around the United States. It also attracts many graduate students from across the country and globe to its research-focused classrooms. Housing ten colleges, ranging from Liberal Arts to Business to Geosciences, and with over 100 majors, SCU draws thousands of students each year to its athletic-centered climate with a solid yet affordable academic reputation.

This public university provides a myriad of experiences to its students via classes, organizations, recreations, and networking opportunities.

Despite all of its advantages and magnetism for a wide-range of students, SCU is a typical historically White university with a standard narration to match, coinciding with America's history of *systemic racism*. It was founded in 1876 and for the majority of its history catered predominately to White males. Only within the past 40 years has SCU opened its doors to women and minorities, though a few White women, Latina/o, and international students were able to learn within its walls prior to the 1960s. As stated in Chapter I, about 47,000 students are currently enrolled at SCU. Fifty-three percent of the population is male and 47 percent is female; therefore, it is obvious that some justice has occurred in the representation of women on campus. Again, nevertheless, of the 47,000 SCU students, 3.0 percent identified as Black, 11.3 percent as Latina/o, and 4.0 percent identified as Asian Americans (Enrollment Profile Spring 2007). Obviously, the same justice has *not* occurred in the representation of students of color on campus since 1960 as it has for women.

As a typical historically White university and White institutionalized space, SCU has had a timeline of events regarding the experiences of racial minorities. The earliest known Latina/o male graduate of SCU was in 1891. In addition, a few Latina/o graduates completed their degrees between SCU's conception in 1876 through the 1960s. However, between 1876 and 1960 the majority of people of color on campus were custodial workers, waiters, and grounds-keepers. Both the campus workers of color and the handful of enrolled Latina/o students faced a hostile White community that

surrounded the university. The majority of the White university community, like the majority of White America between the years of 1876 through 1960, was steeped in the White racial frame which admonished Latina/os, Blacks, and Asian Americans as second-class citizens. Not only were Mexican workers found beaten to death by White university students but also were openly referred to as “an element quite undesirable in a college community” in the student-run newspaper (Siempre! 2006). Additionally, all workers of color were required to carry with them at all times a *Certificate of Identification* which stated that “No household, department, contractor or individual will employ any Negro or Mexican in any capacity whatsoever on the college campus unless they have this certificate” (Siempre! 2006). Even one of the university’s most idolized 19th century leaders was a member of the Confederate army and is *rumored* throughout SCU to have been a Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (Personal Interview with Miguel Juarez 2007)¹⁴.

Though seen with a contemporary eye as unjust, the above goings-on at SCU were chillingly similar to other occurrences throughout the country. Between the years 1876 and 1960, the Reconstruction era was halted and the Jim Crow era reigned. Legal segregation, as found through the previously discussed *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896, Supreme Court case, declared that institutions should be separated by skin color but should remain equal in the opportunities given to the students and members. But such equality did not occur in nearly any social, political, and economic American institution, particularly the education system. In contrast to the “separate but equal” decision,

¹⁴ Much of this information was obtained from the curator of an exhibit at an SCU archival library focusing on the history of Latina/os at SCU and from the exhibition itself as cited in the References.

several terrorist-like hate crimes occurred throughout the country toward peoples of color predominately in the Deep South, including the state where SCU is located. Such terrorist-like hate crimes included the brutal lynching of Blacks and Mexican Americans and the terror raids of the Ku Klux Klan (Personal Interview with Miguel Juarez 2007).

Though some professors' daughters were allowed to attend classes at SCU, it was not until 1963 that the university officially allowed women to receive degrees. In 1964, Black Americans were officially allowed to receive degrees and in 1967 the first Black male student graduated from SCU. A few years later, in 1970, the first Latina graduated from the university (Siempre! 2006).

Though these are monumental occasions, the numbers of students of color has yet to increase significantly. In the 1990s, the number of Black and Latina/o students was increasing and totaled about 16.3 percent of the enrolled student population. However, the year after *Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996, went into effect, the total number of Black and Latina/o students was about 11.6 percent, a 4.7 percent decrease in enrolled students of color across this time span (Quinones 2003). In 1997, SCU developed a strategic plan for the university with the goal to make the university rank among the "top ten" public universities across the country by the year 2020. Part of the strategic plan was to dramatically increase the number of enrolled students of color, i.e., to enhance the university's diversity. Ten years later the total number of Black and Latina/o students is 14.3 percent, not even up to pre-*Hopwood v. Texas* numbers.

In 2003 the Supreme Court cases of *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, respectively decided that the University of Michigan was allowed to use race as a criteria

in admissions, but found a quota system in determining admission based on race was unconstitutional (“Grutter v. Bollinger” and “Gratz v. Bollinger” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia)¹⁵. As a direct consequence of both of these Supreme Court cases, much to the chagrin of SCU alumni of color, SCU’s administration chose to not use race in deciding admissions. However, applicants could cite their racial identities, and how their racial identities have shaped their life experience, in their application essays. Since 2003, the number of enrolled students of color has increased from approximately 6,200 Black, Latina/o, and Asian American students to approximately 8,500 Black, Latina/o, and Asian American students. Though the numbers have increased somewhat, they still remain below pre-*Hopwood v. Texas* standards while explicitly racist acts continue within the university community.

Additionally, the instructional faculty population, i.e., the professors, associate professors, assistant professors, faculty, and teaching assistants who have direct classroom contact with university students, similarly demonstrates the lack of people of color in these positions. In the fall of 2006, there were 15 Black, 29 Latina/o, and 62 Asian American full-professors out of 938 at SCU, comprising 11.3 percent of the professorial population. Out of the entire 3,875 instructional faculty population, as previously defined, 116 were Black, 209 Latina/o, and 216 Asian American, comprising 14.0 percent. In other words, there were a total of 541 faculties of color at SCU compared to the 7,998 students of color in fall 2006 (Black, Latina/o, Asian American),

¹⁵ A similar Supreme Court case was *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) where affirmative action programs were found constitutional but quota systems were barred from use (“Regents of the University of California v. Bakke” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia).

leaving 14.0 percent of the faculty of color to the 17.6 percent of students of color (Enrollment Profile Spring 2006).

In addition to these numbers, within the past decade at SCU, numerous occurrences have transpired on campus and/or within the student body that brought race and racism to the forefront of student life. Similar to the events mentioned in Chapter I, “affirmative action bake sales,” “ghetto parties,” Black-face minstrel videos, and even a cartoon in the school newspaper negatively characterizing Black Americans all occurred within the walls of SCU. As a result, SCU has held several university symposiums creating dialogues between the student body and the administration and, more specifically, dialogues between students of color and the rest of the university’s White majority. In addition, committees have been formed across faculty, student, and administration boundaries in order to address front-stage racist events occurring within the SCU community.

Given the foundational history and contemporary demographics of SCU as a White institutionalized space within the systemically racist United States and its continued existence within *systemic racism* regarding the experiences of students of color, it can be determined, without much convincing, that many racial minorities would find SCU to be a hostile setting in which to receive their advanced degrees.

Why do Latina/os Choose to Attend SCU?

With this racial, or rather *racist*, history and current setting of SCU within the *systemic racism* frame, why do Latina/o students choose to attend the university in spite

of all this perceived hostility? Out of the 17 interviews conducted, three main themes were found:

- 1) the affordability of the university,
- 2) the proximity of the university to their hometowns, and
- 3) the university's reputation and direct contacts university representatives made with the students while in high school.

Financial Aid: "Yeah, I have just about everything paid for, so it worked out well"

Ten out of the 17 Latina/o students indicated financial aid to be a main reason they chose to attend SCU, even when they originally wanted to attend different universities across the state and country.

Mary, a senior sociology major from a major metropolitan area near the university, indicated that she originally planned on attending another state school, SCU's main rival, but chose to attend SCU because of the financial aid. Specifically, she states:

[SCU] wasn't my first choice. I really wanted to go to [other state school] ... and I only came here because they gave me more financial aid than [the other state school] did.

Another student, Melanie, a sophomore health major from a predominately Latina/o community, discusses a specific scholarship program, for which she was qualified, as the main stimulus for her attending SCU:

Well, I applied because we had a speaker go to our classroom, we had a college prep class, and, um ... she was talking about the traditions and she mentioned a scholarship that is called the [Ambassador] Scholarship and it's basically if you're a first-generation student and if your parents make less than \$40,000 then you get a scholarship. So, right away I was, like, "I have to apply

to that school to get it!” So, that was the main reason why, because of the scholarship, because I wanted everything paid for. And I chose [SCU] because of that, because they paid for everything. So, that’s basically it.

Michael, a junior transfer student from a rural area of the state, said the following:

Um, plus it was financially perfect. The quality of the education was worth the price.

As shown, financial considerations are a major, if not *the* major determining factor when choosing a school to attend. Finances, as shown in the case of Mary, even trump the desire to attend another institution, one that may have been more hospitable to students of color.

Location: “It’s close to home, but it’s not too close”

Several students indicated that SCU’s proximity to their home was a deciding factor in choosing to attend the institution.

When asked why she applied to SCU, Roxie, a senior sociology major from a metropolitan suburb, stated the following:

That’s a good question. I really didn’t investigate [SCU] whatsoever. Like, the school, I knew it was a good school but I just knew that I wanted to be in [the same state] and the two schools to apply to were [the other state school] and [SCU] and only God knows why I decided to come here instead of [the other state school].

Lorena, a junior political science major from a diverse metropolitan area, says the following concerning SCU’s proximity to her hometown, “Not too far away from home but it’s far enough.” Michael provides a similar testimony as he answers the question regarding why he choose to attend SCU, “Um, because it was fairly close to

home, but it wasn't too close." In addition, Armando, a junior urban and regional planning major from a predominately Latina/o metropolitan area, stated along similar lines:

It's kinda nice because it's not too far from home too. I still have that connection; I can go down there ... Because I'm really close to my family and all. I don't try to go too often because it gets expensive, but I go when I can.

Many of the Latina/o student respondents indicated that the proximity to their hometown was a key factor in attending SCU, which is somewhat similar to the findings of Desmond and Turley (2007) indicating that Latina/o students in Texas are more likely to live at home during college. However, the students interviewed alluded to "the best of both worlds" situation, which is that they are both far enough away from *and* close enough to their hometowns.

Personal Contacts and Reputation: "I was recruited"

Personal Contacts

Ten of the 17 students indicated that personal contacts by friends, family members, high school counselors, and, mostly, by SCU recruiters is what encouraged them to attend SCU.

An example of a student who was influenced by friends included Roxie who stated:

I was going to be a journalism major and I just, one of my friends, she was going to come here and her parents had come here and they were like, "It's so great," and also that this is a great school that I should attend.

Ofelia similarly, yet reluctantly, stated that advice from high school counselors dramatically influenced her decision:

It was my first choice, it was my first choice. And the reason it was my first choice was because I wanted to go to vet school and, uh, counselors in high school told me that ... First of all, I had no idea how applying to a profession school worked. So I thought, "Is it easier to go to [graduate specialized] school where the [graduate specialized] school is that you went to undergrad?" And the counselors said, "Yeah, yeah it is. You should go there." And I didn't think, "that means I'm going to spend 8 years in that place." I didn't think about that. I know it sounds really, like, "Duh!" but I really didn't know that. It never hit me.

When asked why she applied to SCU, Lorena stated, "Um, I was recruited, um, someone came and met with my parents and myself, um, yeah, it was my first choice."

Vanessa states a similar story as a grade-school friend told her about a "good school" in the university's city. And then in high school, a Latina/o recruiter persuaded her to visit. Soon after her contacts with the recruiter, she was sent information about a program geared to first-generation university students.

When asked why she applied to SCU, Jennifer stated:

It wasn't my first choice, at all really. I barely heard of it my senior year of high school, in the fall. And um, I applied because, it was actually the only public school I applied to. But the recruiter was very much involved in our high school. [SCU] actually sent a recruit to my area because it was, like, the population is high in Mexican Americans. And I guess [SCU] wants to recruit more minority students, so they sent, they actually opened up a center down there. So he was very involved with us. He invited, he took us on a trip for free to go and see [SCU] and he even went so far as bringing students to come talk to us about [SCU] and take us to conferences that [SCU] was having for free. And everything was provided for us. Free food and everything. And um, I even met with him and a couple of other students from [SCU] for dinner at [a restaurant] once. And he was just very nice and very, he was just very persistent that he wanted me to apply to [SCU] because I

showed a record of leadership and I just had a really good standing in high school and so he said that if he got me into [SCU] it would be a highlight because I was a really good student. Um, so that's why I applied. Just because, I mean, [SCU], because of his efforts, it kind of made [SCU] more personal, you know. No other recruiters were pursuing me in that way. And, I remember speaking to one from [a private school] and that's about it. I spoke to him once. But, you know, this person actually became a part of our lives. And this is, like 12 students from my school went, where as the year before only one.

Linda stated that a program that she came through as a high school student influenced her decision to come to SCU:

And over the summer I went there but, like, the environment, I didn't really like it. And then I came here to [SCU] with [a specific recruiting program], and through them I saw what [SCU] was. I saw, like, everybody was really friendly, like everybody [greeted] prospective students or what not. And that's what really caught my attention. And I was looking for something kind of, like, family oriented as to where [the other state school] didn't really have that 'cause people were just, like, they wouldn't even say "hi" or whatever. So that's another reason why.

Roxie and Ofelia both demonstrated how personal contacts, either in the form of close friends or high school counselors influenced their decision to attend SCU. Even more dramatically, Lorena, Jennifer, and Linda's statements prove that the *persistent* recruitment efforts toward potential minority student populations prove to be fruitful in some instances. The social network of friends, high school officials, and university spokespeople are clearly influential in students' choices regarding higher education.

Reputation

Seven of the 17 students indicated that the reputation of the school also influenced their decision to attend SCU. Typically, students knew about SCU's reputation heard via their social networks.

Linda, a female member of the ROTC program, stated that the reason she applied to SCU was because of the ROTC program. She states:

I wanted to continue the military, but I didn't want to join the service, the armed service, so, because of [ROTC]. And because of its, like, prestige or what not ...

Michael chose SCU because it had the number one program in what he wanted to major in. Ofelia was originally reluctant to attend SCU but stated, "I chose, compared to the other schools I applied to, this is the highest tier." In addition, Carlos stated that he had always been associated somewhat with SCU because he came to visit while he was in middle school and he felt as if it had everything. He said it was the first "big-time" university that he had experienced.

From the notoriety of a specific organization to specialized departments to overall university ranking, SCU's reputation in some way, shape, or form, had a significant influence on the students' decisions to attend.

What do Latina/os Experience at SCU?

Despite the attractive reasons and benefits of attending a university like SCU, the experience of Latina/o students at historically White colleges/universities *does* include negative incidents. And many of these experiences can be mentally and emotionally debilitating, thereby framing the institutions as hostile environments for students of color. Out of the 17 interviews conducted, three main themes regarding the experiences of Latina/os at SCU were found:

- 1) their attitudes toward the small population of students of color at the university,

- 2) any racist acts they experienced as Latina/o students, and
- 3) any considerations they had regarding transferring to another university or college.

Low Populations of Students of Color: “Where are all of the minorities?!”

Several respondents had friends attending other universities with larger concentrations of racial minorities who made light of them attending SCU, a place viewed as predominately White. For instance one student, Emily, stated:

I had friends who went to [the other state school] and they asked me why I came here ‘cause it’s all White. I said that I hadn’t really noticed that it was all White the first time I visited. But, I saw the change in the White culture during my orientation.

Even before attending SCU, Emily’s social network was aware of SCU’s primary demographic and warned Emily. Their taunting of Emily for attending a predominantly White university speaks to the knowledge of minority networks that SCU is an institutionalized White space inhospitable to racial minorities, and that, if possible, one should avoid attending the university.

Other students indicated a negative state of shock when first realizing SCU’s demographics, i.e., “the White culture,” as Emily had described. For example, Roxie states:

I guess I was really taken aback because my high school was very, uh, had a great population. Has some White, has some Black, so I was just like, “ugh!” I didn’t like it.

Before entering college, Roxie had experienced some racial diversity in an educational setting. Therefore, when she realized that SCU did not have racial diversity, she expressed discontent toward SCU’s environment.

Linda, a female ROTC member, expounded on the initial shock felt by both her and her father on her first day on campus:

... it was like a shock factor. Once I got here I just remember my dad dropping me off for freshman orientation week which is a week before school starts. He was like, "You can count how many Hispanics are here." And especially within [ROTC] because [it] is a White-male dominated organization. And then it was a shock factor coming from [a major metropolitan area] where to a public high school, the majority are Hispanics. And I was like, "wow".

What is striking in Linda's comments are not only her feelings toward the mainly White composition of her new environment, but also her father's reaction to the lack of diversity at SCU. Understandably, he was in shock at the lack of a diverse environment in which he was about to leave his daughter.

Mary became fairly open about her negative frustration and dislike with the lack of students of color at SCU. She became aware of the small population when she first visited with high school peers. She described her initial perception as follows:

Um, at first, I don't know. At first it was a little intimidating, just 'cause it was a big school and stuff. And it just seemed, it seemed kind of fake. It seemed everybody was just nice just because. Like they were putting on this. I don't know, like they were putting on this mask. And, and it just seemed really fake ... It got a little better once I started my freshman year. It, it took a while to kinda get that out of my system and stuff. And I think it was just, it was just a little strange just because it was mainly a, like, White population. And the high school I went to was, like, 97% minority ... And like I grew up ... I didn't grow up in, like, a White neighborhood. Like, I grew up in, like, a majority Hispanic neighborhood. So, I think that played a big part in, like, it being an intimidation factor coming here. So. I blend in, I think, with most of the White population, 'cause I don't, I don't, you know, look Hispanic. It just feels different.

As a light-skinned Latina who could potentially pass as White, she goes on to state:

I think it's easier for people, who are light-skinned Hispanics, and stuff, and don't have, like, Hispanic or Mexican-sounding last names, just 'cause it's so much easier to blend in. You know. And if I wanted to, I could've pretended that I wasn't Hispanic, you know. I don't think anyone would have ever noticed. Like, I have colored [green] eyes and I'm really, really light complected. But, it's just the fact that, like, I grew up with a Hispanic family, you know. And then going to an all-minority school and then coming here. It's just, like, you feel, you know, like you know you're Hispanic. And you feel that. And then you come here. It's just, it's just scary.

Mary's comments are instructive in three ways. First, she automatically indicates her sense of being an "other" in a majority White community. Second, as an "other" she eloquently describes her state of *shock* as a Latina from a majority Latina/o-community entering a majority White community. The words she uses to describe feelings, such as "intimidating," "fake," and "different," indicates a strong sense of distress and a misallocation between her and the historically White university. Third, as a Latina who could potentially pass as White, she indicates that she may experience less distress than students who are ostensibly Latina/o while simultaneously indicating apprehension as a Latina on the majority White campus. Her straightforward statement, "it's just scary," may epitomize the sentiments of many students of color at historically White colleges/universities throughout the country.

When asked what that realization process was like and how it made her feel another respondent, Jennifer, stated:

I felt ugly. I remember my new student conference, well, that's also due to, well, we drove 7 hours, we left at 2 in the morning, I was sick that day. We had to be there at 9 a.m., um, at the building with everybody. So, I was just dressed in a t-shirt and jeans. But

then I get there and there's, there's all these White girls that look really pretty but I'm sick and groggy and grumpy and just different looking. And I remember feeling just completely unattractive at that point, which, you know, could have been due to several factors. Like, my mood at the time, but that's how I felt that day. The realization, I felt, oh I know. There was [a Mexican American student organization] and, like, there's Latina/o organizations and I just wanted to cling to them. You know, I wanted to find that family and that comfort. Um, I also just wanted to distinguish myself. Suddenly, I got this big pride in my hometown and, not necessarily in Mexico, but in my culture. And, you know, because it distinguished me from the majority of students at [SCU].

Similar to Mary's response, Jennifer's personal insights were also instructive on three levels. First, like Mary, Jennifer automatically indicated her sense of being an "other" as she uses the words "different looking." Second, she demonstrates feelings of inferiority based on appearance and White-norms regarding beauty. As she states, "I felt ugly," she is comparing herself to the White standard of beauty and appearance within the White racial frame. Though one can argue that situational conditions occurred, i.e., late-night travel, Jennifer's framing of her appearance as "ugly," "different looking," and "completely unattractive" indicates a profound comparison and inadequacy as a Latina to her White female peers. Third, Jennifer's immediate attraction to Latina/o-focused organizations and her sweltering sense of cultural pride demonstrates the significance of her race to her overall identity. It also demonstrates the significance of peer networks within minority-focused student organizations. By latching onto her racial/ethnic identity and to minority-focused organizations, Jennifer participates in a type of resistance to how the White racial frame defines beauty and physical worth. Unfortunately, however, Jennifer had to experience all of that within the first five minutes on the campus of her future alma-mater.

Michael was aware of SCU's lack of diversity; however, he did not believe, at first, that the experience would be drastically different from his predominately White elementary-, middle-, and high-schools. Craig correspondingly stated:

I knew it was going to be a small town like that, but I was like, you know, I've always, always, kinda, like been the minority. Like, in all my [high school] classes, I was usually, if not the only one, the one of two. So, I was used to being around a lot of White people and a lot of Asian people too. So, it wasn't too, I guess, I felt that I wouldn't be too out of place.

However, he goes on to state:

The first few weeks of school were really bad, just 'cause I didn't know anybody. I was just, really, I guess, self-conscious, I guess. I was pretty shy ... 'Cause seriously freshman year I was living in the dorms and in almost all of my classes, like, at first I didn't notice it, but, I was the only one, and then I started counting the people, or just taking a survey, and I think I was the only Hispanic person in all of my classes and stuff. I just kinda felt like, "Ahhh!"

Though somewhat "used to" being in majority-White situations while in his youth, Craig indicated a strong feeling of "otherness" once living within SCU's White institutionalized space, similar to Mary and Jennifer. Specifically like Jennifer, Craig placed the inadequacies on himself stating that he was "self-conscious" and "pretty shy." Though he did not initially notice the White institutionalized space, he slowly became aware of the situation. His final reaction of "Ahhh!", or rather his inability to put his feelings into audible words, alludes to a deep-set frustration as a Latino living within the White institutionalized space without social relationships, or even interactions, with other Latina/o students.

Racism: “They all said ... that they hated immigrants”

Four types of experiences were found regarding racism experienced by Latina/o students at SCU. The following section will describe discriminatory acts students have experienced in some way, shape, or form. The interviews demonstrated that the four types of experience were as follows:

- 1) direct encounters with racist White people,
- 2) indirect encounters with racist White people through stories of peers who have had direct encounters with racist White students,
- 3) the experience of students who could seem White to others,
- 4) uncomfortable experiences.

Direct Encounters with White Racist People at SCU

Eight of the 17 students interviewed directly experienced racism from their White peers in the student body and/or authority figures.

When asked the question, “Have you ever felt uncomfortable as a minority at SCU?,” Roxie responded:

Yes. Because, I guess when, uh, [an extreme conservative student-run organization] does different like, the, ur, attacking minorities, and they’ve already explicitly said, I guess, that they’re not for diversity for [SCU] which to me is not only me as a Mexican person but as a woman ‘cause you know since it was all guy ...which means before minorities and before women that’s how, those were the “good old days” so I guess, yeah.

When asked if she has ever been mistreated because of race at SCU, she responded:

Um, I think, well, when um they had the affirmative action bake sale like a ... member [of the conservative student organization], I felt like he sought me out because I was Mexican. Like he came up to me and was like, “It’s not that I don’t like you.” I’m like, “Why

are you coming up to me like out of all these people that are down here?" And he's like, "I just wanted to let you know, you know, it's not that we don't want people here, we just don't think that y'all should be able to get in over other people, you know, like race shouldn't be a factor, you know." He's like if you're educated you should be able to get in, and, and, he sort of put it in a way that um, it'd be better for me too because then I wouldn't have the idea that people were looking down on me 'cause I know that people got in because on the same standards, so he kinda reversed it. He's like "you don't need any help to get in do you? You're smart enough to get in here." I'm like, yeah. And he goes, "well, see, if you put that race thing in there then people are going to think that, you know." So he kinda reversed psychology, you know, so . . .

Roxie's statements shed light not only on her experience as a Latina standing up for her right to be a student but also regarding the behavior of the White student who confronted her. She specifies a particular distress as a female student of color entering a historically White institutionalized space where her identity and presence are scrutinized. The behavior of the White male student particularly demonstrates the active use and presence of the White racial frame and White institutionalized space at SCU. The subtle existence of an "us' versus 'them'" mentality exists when the student said to Roxie:

I just wanted to let you know, you know, it's not that *we* don't want *people* here, *we* just don't think that *y'all* should be able to get in over *other people*, you know, like race shouldn't be a factor, you know.

The White male student's statements echo the deep set racist beliefs of many White people, despite age, throughout the country. The language that he uses, specifically within the setting of an affirmative action bake sale, suggests the use the color-blind racism framework of abstract liberalism. His comments toward Roxie obviously shook her identity as a Latina as he questioned not just her presence at the university, but, more deeply, her intelligence and her scholastic capabilities.

Glenda, a junior nutrition major from a major metropolitan area close to SCU mentioned her experiences in a group setting when first visiting the campus:

Some people from this group were close-minded; in my group, which wasn't a diverse group, they all said [all the White kids] that they hated immigrants. I regret not saying anything ... it bothered me ... my parents are immigrants, well, now residents, but still ... I regret not saying anything ... I mean, immigrants aren't all bad ... they were small town White people ... I didn't have a diverse group.

When later asked if she has ever been mistreated because of race at SCU, she stated:

Just that instance. The team leaders agreed and I started crying. I felt like I should have said something. I didn't say anything because everyone was agreeing and I didn't feel close to them.

Glenda's story highlights the emotions evoked when White students articulate blatant racist ideals. Directly in front of Glenda, whose parents emigrated to the U.S, White students expressed hatred toward immigrant groups. Justifiably so, Glenda expressed her frustration and anger, as a child of immigrants and as a Latina, listening to these obvious racist comments by crying. Even three years later this direct experience with White racism unconstructively affects her and even evokes regret. She now lives with both the experience of direct racism and also with the regret of not standing up for her family's immigrant identity. However, as the only Latina present in a group of White students while visiting a historically White university, could she have said anything without putting herself in more jeopardy?

When asked if he has ever felt uncomfortable as a Latina/o at SCU, Craig responded with an anecdote of a White person in authority:

I did. I think the first few weeks of school, um, mainly because this one teacher, she's very, and I was talking to some friends later that I

made afterwards, they agreed that she was very politically incorrect, I guess. And, like, I don't think she meant to pick on minorities, but she would make these huge statements that just sounded really bad. It was a psychology class. And she was, she made a comment about, like, she was like trying to prove something about stereotypes, I guess. And she was saying, and she said there's this stereotype that Mexicans are, like, lazy or something. And then she said, "That's not true, because the ones that mow my neighbors' lawns are really hard working." And stuff. And everyone laughed. And I just felt, like, "Oh crap. That's so not cool." But, like, and then later, I don't think she meant it that way. Like later, um, it was really uncomfortable because everyone was laughing and I just kinda felt, like, very bad. And, like, I talked to some later and they were, like, "Yeah, she's says some things."

Craig's comments illustrate a specific experience where a White professor, an authority figure, misuses the classroom as a pulpit to incorrectly define stereotypes. Particularly disconcerting is that as a person with a PhD in psychology, this *professor* said two apparent racist comments in front of a group of predominately White students, further establishing White racism in an already-established White space. The professor demonstrated little regard for students of color in her classroom by using overt racist handles in front of a classroom of susceptible college students. Furthermore, she has a reputation among students for politically incorrect remarks. Also interesting is Craig's response to the racism he encountered. As one of the only, if not *the* only Latina/o in the classroom, all Craig could do at the time was to be uncomfortable. Was he supposed to laugh with the majority of his White peers at this racist joke directly affecting him as a Mexican American? Or was he supposed to stand-up for himself and say something as a freshman in an Intro to Psychology course? However he reacted, Craig experienced an injustice at the hands of White professor.

Ofelia stated, when asked if she has ever been mistreated because of race at SCU:

Now that's super hard to judge, because you don't want to seem like you're asking for it. But, I've been told general stereotypes that haven't attacked me personally but when I spoke up in class about affirmative action, because we were asked to give our opinions on it, a student addressed me and told me that it's not true, she told me that it's not true, she told me that she's heard, and, like, it's fact, she used the word "Hispanic," that Hispanics take advantage of affirmative action because that's the only way for them to get ahead ... Like it was a fact. Like it's well known as far as taking advantage of this. And I was like, "whoa!" I was like, "no." She didn't say it, like "take advantage" like a person should if there's a door open for you, you take advantage of it because the door's open. No, it's like you're stealing a spot. Like taking advantage over someone, like, in a negative manner ...

Ofelia prefaces her racism stories by stating, "you don't want to seem like you're asking for it." With that preface, Ofelia is already framing her story for a White audience who may not take seriously accounts of racism from people of color, almost as if she has not been taken seriously before. Similar to other student accounts, Ofelia experiences with racism occurred in the classroom as a student practically accused her of cheating her way into the institutionalized White space of higher education. Like Roxie, Ofelia was placed in a situation, by the White student, where not only her Latina identity but also her academic abilities were taken into question if not completely dismissed.

Indirect Encounters with White Racist People at SCU

Six students of the 17 interviewed discussed experiences of friends and peers who had experienced racism at SCU.

Emily stated, when asked if she has ever felt uncomfortable as a minority at SCU:

I haven't personally experienced anything uncomfortable but a friend of mine was walking to the ... parking lot once and she was with a friend and they walked past a couple of White guys and they overheard them say, "this school is full of Mexicans," and I was upset and couldn't believe she didn't say anything back . . . But I know people that have gone through stuff, if you only knew I have so many friends.

Though she had not experienced direct racism, Emily has Latina/o peers that have experienced direct racism. Obviously Emily was still deeply affected by the racism through her friends' encounters with White racist students' territorial statements. Even though she was "upset" that her friend did not "say anything back," she understood the White racist students were unjustifiably attempting to reclaim their White institutionalized space.

Sophie, a junior Latina majoring in psychology, stated that although she has not noticed any mistreatment based on her race at SCU, a friend of hers experienced indirect racism. Sophie stated:

I have a friend that transferred from [a predominately Latina/o university] that had a feeling when walking on campus, like he was the only Mexican minority.

Sophie's friend did not experience direct racism; however they could sense the White institutionalized space by simply walking around campus. If students can simply sense their differences while on the campus where they are supposed to focus on their studies, how well would they be expected to perform academically?

Melanie describes an experience that her and her friend had when they went to the local grocery store:

Well, my friend, well, one time I went to [the grocery store] and this guy, we were barely entering and this guy in a big truck, like a

bunch of White guys, and, um, they stopped and were like, “Are you over 21?” They asked my friend, he was a guy, he was Hispanic also. And he’s like, “No.” And then he’s like, he just drove off, he made a face, and then he just drove off. And then we saw him again inside. And my friend was like, “Oh, I know a friend that’s 21 and he’s coming right now.” I guess they wanted beer or whatever. And he’s like, “What? Are you talking to me?” And he started making all these faces and, like, I saw from far away that they were talking but I didn’t know if, like, he was disrespecting him or something. And he’s like, “Are you talking to me?” And he was like, “I don’t know you.” And he acted really rude to him. And he was like, “You just asked me outside if I was 21.” He’s like, “Don’t talk to me,” and he just walked away ... That was at the beginning of this semester. The first week of school ... Yeah. That was the first time I ever heard something like that. So, I was like, “wow!” ... I was, like, watching them talk, but I wasn’t there *there*. My friend told me about it and I was like, “wow.” I wish I would have been there! I would have told him something like, “Don’t talk to him like that!” I wasn’t there, I was just watching from far away. I thought they were just talking, but no.

She also indicates another experience where her friends, while at a football game where SCU was playing against a rival team known for its substantial population Latina/o students, had the following happen:

My friends were there watching the game, of course, and, um, she’s Hispanic, and they were saying, “Oh, the Mexicans, leave, from [name of rival school]!” And just making comments like that. And my friend told me about it, but that’s just another one I’ve heard about.

Both of Melanie’s indirect experiences with White racist students are edifying.

The first encounter demonstrates how her male friend was ridiculed and shamed by White male students in a public setting. Though their admonitions were not overtly racist, they treated him in a demeaning, “come here *boy*” fashion, indicative of epithets used toward Black and Latino males during segregation. The second encounter again

echoes Emily's story; the White students are claiming their White institutional space in a territorial manner by admonishing the existence of racial minorities on "their" campus.

Experiences of Students Who Could be Seen as White by Others

Three students could pass as White and spoke of situations where their White peers did not know that they identified as Latina/o.

Mary states that she felt uncomfortable as a minority, especially within her interpersonal relationships. Though she states that she has never been mistreated because of her race at SCU, when asked if she has ever felt uncomfortable as a minority, she states:

Um ... sometimes, yeah ... in classes when we have debates and stuff about, like, the whole, like, immigration and stuff like that when that started becoming a hot topic. It kinda made me feel uncomfortable 'cause, like, there wouldn't be any Hispanics in the class, that, since I associate myself as Hispanic, and then people would talk about Mexicans, I'm like "Wait, you can't say that." Like, they would think that nobody else was in the room. That, that would feel uncomfortable ... I was like, "Whoa, whoa! You know, like, I'm Mexican and I don't ..." You know. It, it would just be really uncomfortable. But I've never gotten, I've never been insulted or experienced anything like that, so ...

As a Latina student who could pass as White, Mary has a unique perspective of White racism; she is privy to first-hand experience of back-stage racism. Even though she does claim and voice her Latina identity when she hears racist attacks directed toward the Mexican American community by White students, it does not make the experience any easier to manage.

Melanie stated that sometimes people do not realize that she is Latina until they hear her speak, since she has a pronounced accent. When asked if she has ever felt uncomfortable as a minority at SCU, she states:

Um, at times. Um, especially at [Freshman Orientation]. I wanted to mention that. Because my friend and I went and, um, it's mostly, like, country dancing and you could see that there's little groups. I mean, you know, like, they all stick together and I'm like. Like the one person that talked to me was a Hispanic girl and that was mostly the only friend that I really, really made there at [Freshman Orientation]. There was just country music and they just stick to their own culture. And it was hard because, I was like, I don't know how to dance country, I don't like this music, you know. And it was really awkward and that's when I felt the most, like, "Oh my God, this is so weird and new!" You know, I'm not used to it. And, they were like, "Oh this is fun." You know, we learned the traditions and everything, but it was really, like, out of our culture and it was really different. That was the only awkward part of the whole thing ...

Like Mary, Melanie has a unique perspective on White racism and also on White institutionalized space. Her explanation of her experience at Freshman Orientation is an unambiguous example of how the established White space, where cultural and racial cues run rampant, are blatantly discriminatory toward students of color as they do not take into consideration the cultures of minority students. Melanie's first encounters with her future alma-mater were in a setting where both her race and culture are not even recognized. Ironically, as mentioned in the first part of this thesis, her race and culture constitute a substantial part of the university's state, making them necessary to learn for all races represented.

Students Who Claimed Not to Have Experienced Discrimination

A few of the students interviewed indicated that they had not experienced discrimination. However, when discussing their overall experiences at SCU, they alluded to questionable situations where racism may have come into play.

For example, when asked if he has ever been mistreated because of race at SCU, Armando stated:

No, not really. Some of the guys in the dorm used to poke fun at me, but that wasn't, they were just kidding around ... Yeah, they were just joking. I mean, we were all friends. Other than that, no ... No, I mean, I knew they were kidding around. It was kind of mutual. They'd get it too, so. I mean, it wasn't usually directly related to me. It was usually to my roommate 'cause he knew them a little bit better, so.

Another example is from Carlos. When asked if he has ever felt uncomfortable as a minority at SCU, he said, "Not really." He is the only Latina/o in his section of the ROTC, which is mostly White. During "details" as a freshman, where upperclassmen can manage the freshman, he says that the White upperclassmen used to make him say something in Spanish, even though he was the only one that knew what he was saying. Carlos says that he thought it was funny and that his close friends at SCU are both White and Latina/o.

Both Armando and Carlos claimed not to have experienced racism while students at SCU. However, in both of their responses, it is obvious that their racial identity was manipulated by their White peers through jokes and teasing. Whether or not Armando and Carlos were completely unaware of such treatment, such treatment did occur,

perhaps affecting their overall performance and view of their racial identity within the historically White university where Latina/o students are a small demographic group.

Transferring: “I applied to transfer ... two times”

All of the students were asked the following question in regards to transfer considerations: “Have you ever considered transferring to another college or university? And if so, why or why not?” The student respondents were nearly split even in whether or not they considered transferring. The responses of the nine students who had considered transferring were significant.

Roxie believes she would have wanted to transfer solely for a more diverse student body. She states:

I think I would have probably wanted to transfer. It’s not that I want to be around people that are just like me, but I would rather have a larger percent of minorities, not just Mexican people, just any other race. So I would have probably decided to go to [to the rival school] after knowing that [SCU] just didn’t have any, you know, minority students here ... but I like I wouldn’t do it ‘cause I’ve just had so many credits here and I didn’t wanna be like, I didn’t wanna get further behind at any other place, but just like the town and the people are just, probably just after my sophomore year I was just ready to leave so my junior year was hard, but now that I’m fixing to graduate, I’m just getting through it day by day. I wouldn’t consider going to graduate school here because my time here, my duration’s over you know, I’ve been here long enough and I’m ready to move on.

Even if she were to seriously consider transferring, Roxie states that the work she already accomplished at SCU was not worth taking over at another university. Her reply deeply acknowledges the difficulty of staying at a university where she does not have a Latina/o community around her, as she states her day-by-day method of coping with her time remaining at the traditionally White university.

Mary affirmatively stated that she did want to transfer at one point. She stated:

... well, when I first came here I thought, “Okay, it’s going to be different.” It’s, like, a completely conservative school, you know, a majority White population. I was thinking that it would be a challenge, you know. I’m a liberal, I’m Hispanic. I just don’t fit in here. I thought it was going to be a challenge and then after a while it kinda felt overwhelming. Like, I couldn’t, like, everything was like, like I couldn’t control anything. And, like, I wanted to change people’s perceptions about Hispanics when I was in classes and was in different debates in my Sociology classes. Even in Communication, like in Public Speaking we had a bunch of debates. And I think after that I kinda felt that I wanted to transfer.

Though Mary began her career at SCU with a positive view of the university experience being a “challenge” to learn from, she quickly realized how “overwhelming” it is to be a Latina at a historically White university. After incidents with the predominately White student body in classes, she desired to transfer to a place where her racial identity was not confronted to the same hostile extent.

When asked if she had considered transferring, Melanie stated:

Um, I have. My first year. But who doesn’t? I mean, especially because it was really, really hard. I mean, it was just so different. I mean, there isn’t any, like, clubs, I mean, just like one club ... where we can just go to and dance like salsa and ... music we like. And it was just hard because, um, we were a really small group and there’s really not a lot of places to go out and, I don’t know, not that many Mexican restaurants. It was a little adjustment. And I considered going to [a satellite university] because it was closer to home. It was only, like, two hours away. But I didn’t, my mom was like, “No, no, just, I mean, it will get better. It’s your first year. I mean, it happens because it’s a new place. And just see how it goes your first year and then you’ll decide if you want to go there or stay at [SCU].” And I was like, alright. So, I tried the whole year ...

Initially Melanie’s story dismissed the fact that she had considered transferring, as she rhetorically asks, “who doesn’t?” However, further into her anecdote, Melanie describes

the cultural differences related to the racial demographics at SCU. According to her statement, the greater university community does not provide very many cultural outlets for the Latina/o students to participate in that is related to their differing cultures.

Before the transfer question was even asked, Ofelia clearly stated that she had applied to transfer to SCU's main rival two different times. When asked why, Ofelia stated:

Because I thought there was not a real progressive department here that saw struggles of their minority students. Or saw to help inequities in the world, in society ... There's nothing about social justice. I felt that the social justice atmosphere wasn't here. And that's what I realized that that's what I am. So, I decided that I should go to [the other school] ... [However], I had a bad GPA. I had a 2.9. But I was desperate. When I finally got my GPA up, I had found Sociology and decided that I wanted to stay. That's something I haven't admitted to. Only one other person really knows about that. That's because that was really personal. It really affected me that I was rejected. Of course I feel rejected by the social atmosphere here and then the school I thought had the social atmosphere, I was rejected from. So, that was real tough.

Based on previous statements, when Ofelia discusses the "social atmosphere" at SCU, she is unquestionably including the small population of students of color who experience racism on the historically White institutionalized space of the campus. Her vulnerability regarding the two times she had attempted to transfer and about her GPA was rather telling in how desperately she wanted to leave SCU based on the hostile environment toward and for students of color. The mental and emotional toll was imaginably difficult for Ofelia to contend with while also focusing on her studies and college goals.

Why do Latina/os Choose to Stay at SCU Despite the Hostile Environment?

Given that Latina/o students do find SCU to be a hostile environment, as they have responded to the low numbers of minorities, discriminatory acts they experienced, and have considered transferring universities, why do they decide to stay at SCU? Out of the 17 interviews conducted, three main themes were found as reasons why Latina/o students choose to remain at SCU:

- 1) they want to make a difference at the university for future students of color and see their experiences as a character-building challenge,
- 2) they are drawn to certain characteristics of the university lifestyle, and
- 3) they have professorial mentors that have provided encouragement and guidance.

Emotional Labor: “Make a Difference, Prove to Myself and Others, the Real World”

As mentioned in the Chapter II, emotional labor is a key concept to understanding what and how students of color cope with racism.

Making a Difference

Six of the 17 students stated that “making a difference” for the university motivated them to remain SCU students. For example, Emily stated:

I love the organizations that I’m in, they stress me out, but in the end once the missions are accomplished I get a feeling that progress has been done, that I’ve made a difference like raising the admissions of minorities and stuff, so it’s definitely worth it. (*Started tearing up.*) You have to have the ganas to make a difference, you know. I like the [SCU] family tradition, I don’t go to football games but I’m still a [student] and I’ve seen a change since I’ve been here, like ... the new director of diversity, ‘cause looking up to faculty and minorities that are minorities, it makes me proud. And I like the organizations, and the faculty, and the

traditions, and family feeling, you know ... Well, you know, I would like to eventually come back and work at [SCU], you know, to continue making a difference and all ... cause my bad experiences have only influenced me to do better, you know ... we work with high school students, at risk students, and have fifteen thousand dollars of scholarship money to give them, 'cause they have so much potential but they're just not aware of it, you know.

Emily's account is representative of what several respondents stated as far as "making a difference" for future generations of Latina/o students at SCU. Her emotions run high as she describes the stressful sacrifice being involved in minority-focused organizations which adds to her already packed college career. It is indicative of the extra stress, and need, many students of color may feel toward transforming the hostile environment to one more suitable and welcoming for prospective students of color. Latina/o students are resisting the White institutionalized space of their campus community by creating paths for future generations of Latina/o students.

Proving to Self and Others

Eight of the 17 students suggested that it was important for them to succeed at SCU to prove to themselves and others that they could succeed in college. Sophie, for example, had a deep drive to remain a student at SCU – her family. When asked if she had the opportunity again, would she choose to attend SCU, Sophie said:

I'm the only one that has gone through college, [so I] don't want to let my family down. I'm happy to be an example to my other cousins. [The] only other person who has a college degree in my family is in their 40s.

The pressure of being the only one to graduate from college is significant, especially if you are not only a representative of your family, but also a representative of an entire race who has historically been underrepresented in higher education. Though Sophie

survived the hostility toward students of color, it was imperative for her to remain in order to make her family proud. She felt the need to not only prove, but also be an example to her family that graduating from college *is* possible.

Mary responded to the same question stating:

Um ... yeah, I think I'd probably, if I had to do it all over again, I'd probably come to [SCU] ... Um ... 'cause I think if I would've gone to [the rival school] I would have felt safe and I don't think I would've actually branched out and seen other people's opinions. And I think sometimes I could be closed minded. But then when I came here, it's like you're being, like, exposed to different opinions and stuff and different people's way of thinking that isn't your own. So, I think that's a good thing, coming to a university where you feel out of place and it kinda helps you grow as an individual ... 'cause if, like, if you stay with the same circle of friends for your whole life, it's like you never, like you're the same person the whole time. You never find out who you really are. 'Cause you're just, you do, you've done the same thing your whole life, so it's kinda become, like, a routine. I think that's why I wouldn't want to go to any other school.

Mary's response demonstrates a high degree of maturity, considering she has both direct and indirect experiences with racist students and professors at SCU. Her introspective logic allows her to be aware of her weaknesses as a potentially "closed-minded" person. As a Latina she feels that ultimately it is important for her to grow by being around a majority of people with whom she has very little in common, i.e., her mostly White and conservative peers. This should, however, be the goal of every student in higher education, as Mary movingly states:

... to be exposed to different opinions and stuff and different people's way of thinking that isn't your own ... 'cause if, like, if you stay with the same circle of friends for your whole life, it's like you never, like you're the same person the whole time. You never find out who you really are.

Though SCU's environment was not completely suitable to Mary's overall needs as a woman of color, she maneuvered the White institutional space enough to benefit her as much as possible.

The Real World

Four of the 17 students discussed how SCU prepared them for the "real world."

Again Mary provided a great illustration. She stated:

Um, I thought since I was already here I might as well make the best of it. And I thought, if I'm going to go out and work in the real world, I mean, there's not going to, there's going to be majority White people, you know, anywhere that I'm looking to work. So, I figured that I might as well deal with it and learn how to accept the fact that I am a minority.

What is deeply ironic about Mary's comments is that the "real world," emphasis on *world*, is *not* "majority White people." However, Mary does have, again, a mature outlook on learning and growing from a situation where she is in the minority at a historically White university. However, it is her White peers that will ultimately need to experience the diversity of viewpoints that come when they are surrounded by a substantial amount of peers from differing races, even though it is their White racial frames that hold power both nationally and, arguably, internationally.

Characteristics of the University: "I Can't Imagine Myself Anywhere Else"

Seven of the 17 respondents indicated that certain characteristics of SCU encouraged them to remain students. Though several respondents mentioned organizations, peers, and SCU traditions as positive influences, several of those seven mentioned that professors and academics were *the* driving influences, as Mary, Melanie, and Ofelia depict:

Um, probably the faculty. I've never disliked any professor that I've had. They've always been really helpful. Academics. I'm not a big fan of traditions here. Probably just the academics, the professors, and the faculty. - Mary

Academics. It's a really good school and I've always been told that if, you know, the Aggie Ring and if someone sees the ring on your finger then, um, they'll think highly of you because it's a wonderful school. So, academics have played a big role in it also. - Melanie

The professor support, the Sociology support ... The genuine push for equality and social issues in that department. That's what pushed me to stay. And then, second, were the opportunities I got from [a certain professor in the department]. [An internship in Washington, DC and a research program in another state]. And then those professors telling me, "You can do it here at [SCU]. You can major in this and do what you need to do. You don't need to go to [the other state school] to be able to get your PhD ... somewhere else. We'll help you." That's what encouraged me to stay. - Ofelia

Mentors

Expanding on professorial influence and support, ten of the students were asked if they had any mentors at SCU, and if yes, if any of their mentors were Latina/o. Out of the ten students who were asked, seven students did indicate they had mentors at SCU. However, only four indicated having Latina/o mentors. Out of the four, only three had Latina/o mentors specifically at SCU.

Ofelia had a particularly moving example of the benefits of having another Latina as a mentor. When asked if she had any mentors at SCU, Ofelia stated:

Alright ... there's three of them. Two of them ... are both White. The third one was really significant in making me do the final movement into Sociology ... She's a PhD student [and academic advisor]. And, I told her in what I was interested in and she was like, "Why are you a biomedical science major?" And I was like, "I don't know!" So, she told me, "You know, this is how many Latinas get their PhD's. It's really small. I think you can do it.

This is how you do it. Let me see your schedule.” ... She has also written me letters of recommendation and helped me make my final decision and told me, “You can major in Sociology and make something with your life and not starve to death.” And she is a minority. And I can say from, I can definitely, I feel like I can be myself with her because she knows where I’m coming from.

By simply having a conversation with a Latina faculty member who not only provided her with solid advice but also served as an example of Latina/o success in higher education, Ofelia was motivated to continue with her Bachelor’s degree in order to eventually attain a Doctoral degree. As previously cited, the representation of Latina/os in higher education is significantly low; therefore, for a Latina/o student to see representation among faculty can often times be the stimulus for continued and future pursuit of higher degrees, in spite, or because of, the oppressive White institutionalized space in which they are confined.

Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the setting of SCU as a white institutionalized space rooted in America’s racist history. In doing so, it cited past racist events and how students of color have been represented throughout the decades. It also discussed the current demographic predicament of SCU with a low number of Latina/o, Black, and Asian American students.

The majority of this chapter expounded on the three major themes found in the 17 interviews conducted with Latina/o students at SCU. The themes again were:

- 1) Latina/o students choose to attend SCU because of the:
 - affordability of the university
 - proximity of the university to their hometowns
 - university’s reputation and direct contacts university representatives

2) Latina/o students experience racial oppression in the form of:

- the small population of students of color at the university
- racist acts directed toward them as Latina/o students
- considerations regarding transferring to another higher education institution

3) Latina/o students choose to remain SCU students despite the hostile environment because:

- of a desire to make a difference at the university for future students of color and see their experiences as a character-building challenge
- they are drawn to certain characteristics of the university lifestyle
- relationships with professorial mentors who provide an example of success

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

We must continually remind students in the classroom that expression of different opinions and dissenting ideas affirms the intellectual process. We should forcefully explain that our role is not to teach them to think as we do but rather to teach them, by example, the importance of taking a stance that is rooted in rigorous engagement with the full range of ideas about a topic.

- bell hooks, 1994

This study originally sought to investigate the reasons why undergraduate students of color at South Central University (SCU), a historically White university, choose to pursue higher education studies despite the universities potential as a hostile environment for racial minorities. Specifically, this was a mixed-methods study involving 287 surveys from Black, Latina/o, and Asian American students and 17 semi-structured interviews with Latina/o students.

Result Summaries

From these mixed-method results, the following themes can be summarized:

Quantitative Summary

- The size of a hometown has a statistically significant effect on how often discrimination is experienced. In other words, racial minority students at SCU from urban areas are more likely to experience discrimination - often based on their race - on the part of other students.

- Self-identifying as Black has a statistically significant effect on how often discrimination is experienced. In other words, Black students at SCU are more likely to experience discrimination - often based on their race - on the part of other students.

Qualitative Summary

- Latina/o students choose to attend SCU because of university affordability, proximity to their home towns, and the university's academic reputation.
- Latina/o students experience racial oppression at SCU because of the lack of campus diversity, direct racist acts toward themselves and friends, and they consider transferring to more diverse educational institutions.
- Latina/o students remain at SCU because they want to make a difference at the university for themselves and others, certain characteristics of the university are appealing, and because of professorial mentors.

Limitations

Limitations to this study were discussed in Chapter III. However, additional points can be stated as follows:

In order to further expand on the quantitative hypotheses and qualitative assumptions, increasing the sample size of both the racial subcategories and the interview respondents would be needed. An advantageous potential research step would be to conduct a cross-comparison analysis between SCU and other predominately white colleges/universities around the country to better understand the experiences of students self-identifying as racial minorities. Additionally, analyzing the core curriculum requirements and the physical space of the campus would also better exemplify how *white institutionalized space* affects students of color. And finally, collecting data on the perspectives of White students regarding racial attitudes and diversity concerns would add an interesting dynamic to this type of research.

Though limitations and prospective research expansions exist, this research is a solid beginning to better understanding the experiences of racial minority students in higher education, especially regarding any racism and discrimination they receive in higher education settings.

Importance of This Research

As stated in earlier chapters, this study adds the imperative perspective of students of color, specifically Latina/o students, and how they experience institutionalized racism at a college/university level. In addition, this research brings to life the theoretical frameworks as highlighted in Chapter II.

Theoretical Importance

Theories such as racial formation theories, systemic racism, the white racial frame, and color-blind racism have all been demonstrated within the research, especially within the qualitative findings. The different meanings students of color attributed to their experiences and their racial identities within these situations demonstrate the fluidity of race, as framed by the racial formation theory. SCU's history nestled within the history of race and racism in the U.S. summarily demonstrates systemic racism's magnitude. Additionally, Mary's experience as a Latina/o who could pass as White allowed her to witness the white racial frame while experiencing double-consciousness as she found herself "privy" to the racist logic of White students. Finally, Roxie's experience at an affirmative action bake sale demonstrates the delusions of color-blind racism's assumptions that we are living in a post-racial society.

Widespread Importance

Racism, however, is prevalent not only at SCU but at all U.S. educational institutions, from kindergarten to graduate programs. The turmoil surrounding Jena 6¹⁶ is but one ostensible issue exemplifying the severe racism students of color experience in classrooms from the District of Columbia Public School System to Jena, Louisiana to SCU. Students of color face, manage, and overcome *systemic racism*, the *white racial frame*, and *color-blind racism* every single day along with the responsibilities of academics, extracurricular activities, family- and friend-relationships, and the ups-and-downs of just being a kid.

My research highlights key trends, especially within the Latina/o-student-interviews, of how students of color choose a college/university, how they experience and manage racism within the college/university, and why they do not drop-out despite the racism. By providing Latina/o students a valid and external opportunity to voice their frustrations, coping mechanisms, and goals, this study not only validates their experiences but also empowers them as change agents, both as current students and as future alumni.

Utilization of This Research

This data, and similar data also using students' voices, can be utilized by higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and advocates. University officials are familiar with the statistics of their own universities; they know how many students are enrolled and withdraw each semester, and they know the race/ethnicity, gender, and nationality of

¹⁶ Refer to Chapter I, page 2, of this study for a summary of Jena 6.

their students. However, can university officials provide a voice to their students of color? Do they know what enrolled students of color experience on a daily basis? Do they know how much mental, physical, and emotional energy students of color expend to combat and cope with racism directed toward them by White students, staff, faculty, and administrators?

Using this research, and research similar to it, can be powerful tools for college/university officials to gain a perspective on what occurs within their college/university campuses and communities on a daily basis. In doing so, additional resources can be given to multicultural organizations and programs, diversity trainings and curriculum, and to mentoring programs involving minority students and minority professors. Also, this research can be used to decide how safe spaces can be configured for students to discuss and overcome racism and discrimination, and for students of color to retreat to when such events occur.

However, it is necessary to state that only by continually and consistently giving students of color a forum to voice experiences, frustrations, and ideas can college/university officials truly understand and improve the current predicament. Also, students of color need significant leadership roles within the college/university to affect change. Furthermore, not only should students of color be given an official voice, but also their parents¹⁷ and family support since the degree completion process is not only an individual journey but also a family/community journey, especially if students are first-generation college/university children.

¹⁷ This suggestion of giving voice to parents is similar to suggestions from *The Agony of Education* (Feagin et al. 1996) as described in Chapter II.

In the end, college/university administrators need to recognize that the recruitment of students of color is only a small step in the process. Issues of retention and the improvement of campus climate are more difficult challenges that need to be overcome in order to make their places truly welcoming environments to students of color.

Summary

In conclusion, the goal of higher education should not only be to increase racial minority percentages, but to also transform higher education institutional spaces to being hospitable, welcoming, and advantageous for all students of color. As bell hooks stated in the opening quote to this chapter:

We must continually remind students in the classroom that expression of different opinions and dissenting ideas affirms the intellectual process.

These “different opinions and dissenting ideas” can only be met once students of color are fairly represented and given a valid voice within educational institutions. Not only will the intellectual process for *all* students be affirmed, but also the emotional, physical, and social processes involved in academic growth and achievement. The beneficiaries of this academic growth and achievement are not only educational institutions and their current students, but American society as a whole. The students of today are the future leaders of all of our tomorrow.

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