

**TAKING THE PICTURE OUT OF THE FRAME:  
A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO RACIAL IDENTITY**

A Dissertation

by

VERONICA ADELE JONES

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	Christine Stanley
Committee Members,	Yvonna Lincoln
	Jean Madsen
	Wendy Moore
Head of Department,	Fred Nafukho

May 2014

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Copyright 2014 Veronica Adele Jones

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the multidimensional racial identity of African American undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Racial identity has progressed from models of stage development to a premise that there is no optimal mental development that black individuals must achieve. However, most racial identity models are still operationalized through the use of surveys, which do not provide in-depth meaning behind individuals' racial attitudes. The multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) as the theoretical framework of this study posits racial identity through four dimensions (centrality, ideology, regard, and salience), but it is normally operationalized through the multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI).

Through purposive sampling six African American students were recruited and case study methodology encompassed semi-structured interviews using direct survey items as the protocol in order to create critical discourse. Data collection also included reflection journals and multiple observations in the campus environment to explore the situational component of salience. Each dimension was analyzed independently and dimensions were also cross analyzed to conceptualize the PWI environment's influence on students' racial beliefs.

Findings on racial centrality revealed the intersectionality of students' core identities and how black identity acted as a filter for interpreting the PWI environment. Racial ideology gave evidence to the PWI's racial dichotomy through students' involvement in either mainstream/traditional student organizations or racially-based

organizations. Participants' affiliations highlighted disconnect in the black student community based on involvement norms and the strong presence of white ideologies in campus traditions. Racial regard findings revealed how knowledge of public group stigmas allowed students to avoid the internalization of those images in their private regard of black group membership. Data on racial salience provided understanding of racially salient moments in campus events and students' perceptions of institutional support. Dimensions separately as well as collectively generated implications for changes needed in practice in order to move beyond diversity rhetoric. This comprehensive qualitative study aids higher education professionals in acknowledging the role of representative that black student leaders must negotiate. It also highlights the need for constructivist approaches in future research to explore the racial realities of student of color.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Dorothy Jones Williams and the late Dr. Alphonzo Jones. Dad, I know that you are smiling down from heaven right now, and I hope to follow in your footsteps by bringing excellence to the title of Dr. Jones. I love you both always!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Christine Stanley. My journey to completing this degree was blessed the day that you committed to being my chair. I can honestly say I have had the best experience possible because of your mentorship, wisdom, and guidance. You have provided the perfect balance of challenge and support, and the family environment that you created for us in our own little higher education cohort made all the difference. Graduate students need someone who will be their advocate and to go to battle for them if problems arise, and you have been that person for me. The gratitude I have for you is beyond description.

I would also like to thank each of my committee members. Dr. Yvonna Lincoln, the expertise that you shared with me is invaluable. When I began the program I was super intimidated and excited to study under you, but I quickly realized how personable you were. What I appreciate most are the times just sitting in your office when you shared stories about your time as a graduate student and your incredible journey in academia! Dr. Jean Madsen, you have always been in my corner and were the first person I knew I would have on my committee. The feedback you have given me on my writing helped me grow as a scholar, and I am fortunate to have worked for someone I got along with so well. I will miss our chats about the Kardashians and other events in the madness of the social world. Dr. Wendy Moore, I knew from the moment I walked into your office to meet with you about possibly serving on my committee and saw the *Set it Off* movie poster on your wall that you were awesome. There were moments in

that sociology course when you would discuss a concept way over my head, but that challenge is exactly what I needed. You expanded my knowledge, research interests, and I thank you for how your work has informed my study.

I have to take the time to thank my higher education cohort, a.k.a. Dr. Stanley's crew. Sitting in our meetings, talking through our struggles, celebrating our successes, and just laughing to keep from crying- those are the experiences that got me through. J'Qualin, Tyra, Genyne, Glenn, Judith, and Dave- thank you because I do not think you realize how much your presence and camaraderie pushed me through. I have heard of graduate students who experience a competitive spirit with their classmates, but you all welcomed me in and were willing to share everything you know with me. As a commuter student who was coming from a totally different world of K-12, it makes me emotional just thinking about how lucky I was to be grouped with all of you.

Without the emotional and financial support of my mom I would not have completed this degree. Anyone who knows my mom knows what an amazing woman she is. Thank you mom for always being there for me and I appreciate you more than words can say. This has definitely been a journey to the finish line, and each and every one of my friends and family who I love deserves an expression of my appreciation. The stress of graduate school can get to you without a genuine support system in your life, and that is what you all are to me. Since my undergraduate days at Southern University through all of the wonderful people that I have met since I moved to Houston, I have learned through this process who my true friends are. My close friends are like my family, and I love you all. To my sisters Annette and Rose, brother-in-law Terence, and

my nephews Kai and Taj, I had to sacrifice coming to Dallas as much once things got hectic with this dissertation. But I tried to make up for it by bringing even more craziness home with me for the holidays. I love love love you guys!

Special thanks to the doctoral students who came before me for the motivation, three in particular, Priyanka, James, and Mac. Priyanka we have gone through this journey together, and I thank God that I have someone I can always vent to- however silly my venting may be. James you always hyped me up from the beginning and it was greatly appreciated even when I had no idea what I was doing. And Mac we did not have to stay friends after you dumped me for the University of Houston, but two fabulous people just have to stick together!

I would like to also thank the EAHR department at Texas A & M for sustaining me through this process. I was able to take classes with some phenomenal professors, and the staff of the department is just amazing. Special thanks go to Dr. Fred Nafukho for all of your support, encouragement, and student-oriented leadership.

And last but not least, I want to thank my study participants. You are some of the brightest and most intelligent undergraduates I have ever met. This whole process would not have been so enjoyable if it had not been for you. There were times during our interviews when I thought we were having way too much fun, because your insight and willingness to be so open with your life experiences is what made this dissertation possible. I cannot wait to hear all of the amazing things you all will do as future black leaders of this country. Words cannot express what you mean to me!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Higher Education Diversity.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Significance of the Study .....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	13
Conclusion.....	18
Definition of Terms.....	20
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	23
Introduction .....	23
Climate, Culture, and the Campus Environment.....	24
Higher Education Access .....	26
Defining Racism.....	29
Race-Critical Theories.....	32
Critical Race Theory .....	33
Institutional Space and Whiteness.....	35
White Privilege and Colorblindness.....	38
Stereotype Threat .....	41
The Ideal of Race and Racial Identity.....	43
Self-Concept and Reference Group Orientation .....	47
Theoretical Framework .....	51
The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identification.....	51
Conclusion.....	58
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....	61
Introduction .....	61

Case Study Methods.....	61
Role of the Researcher and Positionality .....	63
Data Sources.....	66
Site.....	66
Sampling.....	67
Data Collection.....	71
Interviews .....	75
Observations .....	76
Participant Reflections .....	78
Data Analysis .....	79
Limitations .....	81
Conclusion.....	82
 CHAPTER IV FINDINGS.....	 84
Introduction.....	84
Racial Centrality.....	86
Black Self-Image Related to Core Identities.....	87
Emergence of Racial Consciousness.....	91
Sociological Influence of the Collegiate Environment .....	94
Connectivity to Black Group Orientation .....	98
Cognizance of Race and Racism in Social Relationships.....	100
Racial Ideology .....	104
Assimilationist and Humanist Subscales.....	104
Perceptions of the Dominant Group: Imaging .....	106
Socially Prescribed Imaging.....	106
Intergroup Relations: Mainstream Influence on Identity .....	109
Dominant Definitions of Engagement.....	109
Individualism vs. Ascribed Group Identity .....	112
Political/Economic Development: The Perception of Power.....	115
System Representation .....	115
Cultural/Social Activities: Community Norms .....	119
Norms of Black Group Membership.....	119
Oppressed Minority and Nationalist Subscales.....	123
Perceptions of the Dominant Group: Sociocultural Influence of Events .....	124
Manifestation of Racial Profiling and Racism .....	124
Intergroup Relations: The Effect of Whiteness.....	130
Impact of White Institutional Space.....	130
Building Trust .....	133
Political/Economic Development: Racial Separation .....	135
Influence of a Racial Hierarchy.....	135
Cultural/Social Activities: Group Values.....	138
Black Principles and Engagement.....	138
The Then and Now of Activism.....	142

Racial Regard ..... 146

    Public Regard ..... 148

        The Social Construction of Blackness ..... 148

        Realization of Racial Attitudes in the Environment..... 150

    Private Regard ..... 153

        Black Advancements: Past to Present ..... 153

        Perceptions of Elitism vs. Collectivism ..... 155

        The Burden of Representation..... 157

Racial Salience ..... 162

    Race Salient Influence of Minoritized Tokenism ..... 163

    Standard of Institutional Culture and Inclusion ..... 166

    Hybrid of Racial Cognizance within Black Spaces ..... 168

    Lack of Reciprocation in Organizational Support..... 170

Interaction of Dimensions ..... 171

Conclusion..... 174

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS ..... 177

    Introduction ..... 177

    Racial Centrality..... 177

    Racial Ideology ..... 183

    Racial Regard ..... 191

    Racial Salience ..... 198

    Implications for Future MMRI Studies ..... 200

    Conclusion..... 202

REFERENCES ..... 204

APPENDIX A RACIAL CENTRALITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ..... 220

APPENDIX B RACIAL IDEOLOGY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
(ASSIMILATIONIST/HUMANIST)..... 222

APPENDIX C RACIAL IDEOLOGY PROTOCOL (OPPRESSED  
MINORITY/NATIONALIST)..... 225

APPENDIX D RACIAL REGARD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL..... 227

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework: The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity.....	53
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study .....	59
Figure 3. Racial Centrality in the PWI Environment .....	87
Figure 4. Assimilationist and Humanist Subscale Themes .....	106
Figure 5. Oppressed Minority and Nationalist Themes .....	124
Figure 6. Public and Private Regard Themes .....	147
Figure 7. Racial Salience in the PWI Environment.....	163
Figure 8. Cyclical Outcomes of Centrality on PWI Black Student Involvement .....	179
Figure 9. Ideology Matrix .....	185
Figure 10. Racial Institutional Power Ladder .....	193
Figure 11. Racial Institutional Power Cycle (Process of Increased Group Influence)...	195

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Participant Student Organization Involvement .....	70
Table 2. Participant Self-Identified Descriptors.....	88

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Higher Education Diversity**

Although racial and ethnic minorities are projected to make up 54% of the population by midcentury (Garces, 2012), disparities in the educational system continue to perpetuate the underrepresented status of specific minority groups in higher education (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2009; Garces, 2012). While increases in 2008 reflected that participation in higher education of blacks and Hispanics in the age range of 18-24 was 32 and 26 percent respectively, those two racial groups also hold the highest percentages of attendance at for-profit and two-year institutions (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Additionally, in 2007 of the doctoral degrees awarded, only four percent were conferred to Hispanics and six percent to African Americans (Garces, 2012). The need for greater inclusion of various groups to improve campus climates for students of color has been emphasized in research, particularly at predominantly white institutions (Gregory, 2000; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gusa, 2010). A critical approach to understanding the inequalities for racial groups and barriers that continue to exist to increased diversity is still needed. More specifically, mechanisms are being utilized by groups in power and privilege to resist change and maintain racial inequalities in our country's institutions (Walter, 2001; Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006).

Affirmative action, which is the consideration of race or ethnicity as one of a multitude of factors in admissions assessments (Garces, 2012), was highlighted in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as a policy initiative to increase racial and ethnic diversity for those who have previously been excluded from higher education. In the 2003 case of *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the consideration of race in admissions, stating that institutions could benefit from student body diversity and that higher education for our nation's future leaders should be accessible to qualified individuals representing every race and ethnicity (Gurin et al., 2002). However, the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions in order to achieve a compelling interest in diversity is continuously challenged, with the most recent case *Fisher v. University of Texas* brought to the Supreme Court during the fall 2012 term (Garces, 2012). In June of 2013, the Supreme Court emphasized the requirement of strict scrutiny in the academic decision of an institution claiming that diversity is essential to its educational mission (Fisher, 2013). This ruling elicits concern that the previously confirmed overall benefit of increased diversity to higher education (Gurin et al., 2002) will be continuously threatened.

The concept of educational diversity is indeed complex and goes beyond structural diversity, or depiction in numerical representation of racial groups. Critical mass, or meaningful representation of a particular group, ultimately refers to the “substantial, important, and laudable educational benefits that diversity is designed to produce, including cross-racial understanding and the breaking down of racial stereotypes” (Grutter, 2003, p. 15). Proponents of race-conscious policies argue that the

lack of a critical mass of students of color leaves those minority students within an institution with a feeling of tokenism which can negatively impact their educational experience and persistence (Chang et al., 2009). In the context of the continued presence of racial disparities in our colleges and universities and the ban of policies which promote inclusion efforts (Garces, 2012) , there is a need to move past a surface level discourse regarding diversity and to further focus on our existing student communities to truly understand the racial stereotypes that exist.

The *Fisher v. University of Texas* case highlighted the need to reexamine the meaning of diversity beyond dominant and surface level discourse. In defense of its admissions policies, University of Texas officials elaborated in oral arguments the need for “diversity within diversity,” meaning that underrepresented groups cannot be treated as homogenous but rather consisting of a variance of individual distinctions. Without the perspective of variance pertaining to members within a particular group, socially constructed stereotypes remain a threat to be associated negatively with group members regardless of individual differences. Furthermore, we must look at how the socially constructed racial stigmas placed on students of color in the cultural context of the collegiate environment perpetuate barriers to true institutional change.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In order to probe further into the barriers to increased diversity and integration of African Americans into higher education, researchers in social science must be fully willing to explore students’ racial realities. With increasing claims that we are currently functioning in a “post-racial” society, otherwise called the “myth of racism” (Feagin,

2013), efforts to recognize the racial realities of our social environments are all the more challenged. Some scholars would argue that researchers who highlight race as a variable of study work to further preserve unnecessary focus on racial inequalities and race as a fixed variable (James, 2008; Marks, 2008; Renn, 2004). However, not only have scholars in academia generally accepted that race is a social rather than biological construct (James, 2008; Renn, 2004), researchers in the social sciences reiterate the importance of acknowledging racial inequalities through the study of social interactions so that we may find solutions to racial disparities concretely rooted in society (Stewart, 2008). As James (2008) reiterates, “while it is a biological fiction, it is nonetheless a social fact.” (p. 32)

Barriers to studying the social realities of race stem from decisions pertaining to the knowledge that is scientifically accepted and valued in the academic realm. Kuhn (1996) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* describes paradigms of research as a process of consensus among researchers in a particular discipline; those individuals work to frame what is scientifically acceptable and come to some sort of uniformity within the scientific community (Third World Network, 1993). The scholars in power to decide the norms of science have been predominantly white, male, and elite (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Feagin, 2013). Paradigms which use statistical analysis and hypothesis testing have been the dominant frame of research, under the assertion that empirical methodology and causation statistics rely on objectivity and value-free procedures (Goar, 2008). However, critical analysis of past research which explored racial differences revealed researchers’ use of preconceived biases, distorted logic and skewed

information in order to support their beliefs in white racial superiority (Goar, 2008; Gould, 1993; Gould, 1996). Recent paradigms have evolved with researchers developing epistemological views that challenge the silencing of racial knowledge in research. As Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi articulate, “All scientific endeavors transpire in a world where race, gender, and class are important not only as subjects for investigation, but as structural factors that partly shape researchers and their scientific gaze” (2008, p. 18). There is increased recognition in research of the social realities that guide scientific inquiry.

The reification of race as a fixed and one-dimensional construct can be seen throughout empirical research and practice (Zuberi, 2008). Forms utilized to gather demographic information often require students to choose between racial categories, a practice which fails to allow for the situational identity of multiracial individuals who may shift identities based on the context of the environment in which they are placed (Renn, 2008). Additionally, statistical methods are often manipulated to justify the effects of race on disparities among groups and social distinctions that create discriminatory practices (Stewart, 2008; Zuberi, 2008). Race is also the focus of quantitative studies to critique racial attitudes and practices during specific eras, specifically through the use of survey instruments. However, even though general information can be gathered to accumulate views on race, there are several limitations to the use of surveys. Researchers put frames around the information they seek to gather, and with survey items being restricted on a pre-selected scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, what is missing is rationale, justification, and the ability of individuals

to articulate their racial beliefs (Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi, 2008). In essence, by studying race through a quantitative frame, we continue to restrict the free-flow of knowledge that allows greater insight into the social realities of race.

If we are to study race without approaching it as a static and fixed concept, methodological approaches must be followed that allow for epistemological and ontological views that focus on the socially constructed nature of race (Renn, 2004). Paradigms that follow a constructivist methodology acknowledge multiple, conflicting, and interactive ways of knowing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The scientific thought regarding multiple ways of knowing aligns with the social construction of race, more specifically with the racial identity of individuals. As Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi state, “It is not a question of how a person’s race causes disadvantage and discrimination. The real issue is the way the society responds to an individual’s racial identification... Racial identity is about shared social status, not shared individual characteristics” (2008, p. 7). Racial identity can be described as the significance and meaning individuals place on race using the definitions they create (Helms, 1990). Race-conscious individuals who exist in socially constructed categories share a commonality that is particularly situated in the oppression and discrimination individuals experience due to their skin color (Sanders Thompson, 2001). A constant variable of black racial identity theoretical perspectives has been the negative aspect of being a member of a stigmatized group (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). In alignment with exploring the concept of diversity within diversity, research must continuously evolve to thoroughly consider the impact of assumed stigma associated with black group membership.

While scientific inquiry has advanced to reflect the multidimensional nature of racial identity (Sanders Thompson, 2001), the majority of models have been based on stage progression and implemented through surveys that quantify beliefs and behaviors regarding race. The popular model of racial identity by Cross (1991) is operationalized with a racial identity attitudes scale to determine where individuals fit within five stages of self-realization as they make meaning of race and racism (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Race measured through survey instrumentation has been reified into stages in which individuals are placed based on responses to particular questions, failing to capture the full extent of race as a fluid and socially constructed concept based on situational factors (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). By continuing to work within the dominant frame of research, we do not allow for a critical look at the complexity of race and can never fully realize the racial realities of society (Feagin, 2013). If the majority of studies regarding racial identity in higher education are conducted through quantitative methods, how are we to critically diagnose the racial realities that affect students' collegiate experiences? If true understanding of heterogeneity in the African American student community is the goal, research must highlight the experiential knowledge of black students regarding membership in a socially stigmatized racial group. We must work outside of the standard frame of research.

### **Significance of the Study**

The dominant positivist paradigm follows an epistemological and ontological frame that does not allow for full acknowledgment of racial knowledge that shapes researchers' interpretations. Constructivist methods have evolved to accept experiential

knowledge and allow for a more critical approach to racism and racial realities (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Renn, 2004). This current study transformed the dominant approach to racial identity studies by taking on a qualitative approach to provide for new insights into the process through which students realize their racial attitudes. Kuhn (1996) illustrates the importance of a paradigm shift by employing an analogy of a subject who has inverted lenses fit onto his goggles:

But after the subject has begun to learn to deal with his new world, his entire visual field flips over, usually after an intervening period in which vision is simply confused. Thereafter, objects are again seen as they had been before the goggles were on. The assimilation of a previously anomalous visual field has reacted upon and changed the field itself. Literally as well as metaphorically, the man accustomed to inverting lenses has undergone a revolutionary transformation of vision. (p. 112)

Studies such as the current research which push for a more critical approach to the subject of racial identity through the in-depth experiences of students provide that transformation of vision.

The psychological aspects of racial identification have been highlighted in most studies as the gateway to understanding the unique experiences of African Americans in society. Many positive psychological outcomes have been linked to racial identification, such as increased tolerance, greater sense of purpose, higher levels of self-esteem, and enhanced school performance (Sanders Thompson, 2001). Negative psychological outcomes have also been noted as African Americans work to conceptualize their beliefs

on race. The ideal of negative self-concept has been founded on scientific studies of Black children that equated preferences for white group identification with self-hatred (Cross, 1991).

Particularly during the 1980s, black personality studies focused on establishing basic core tenets for blacks that extended from African traits of survival and collectivism (Baldwin, 1981). Due to the uniquely situated context of blacks in America, previous black racial identity models have been associated with an ideal set of beliefs regarding one's race, with the underlying assumption that individuals must go through a process to reach a positive state of mental health (Sanders Thompson, 1995; Sellers, Shelton, Cooke, Chavous, Rowley, & Smith, 1998). The highly cited Nigrescence theory by Cross (1991) entails the process of becoming black, with studies linking earlier stages of one's life to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 1996). Even as the revised Nigrescence model evolved to account for individual differences regarding the salience of race based on individual factors, stage surveys are still constructed to place individuals in a particular stage in their identity development progression. Studies which are operationalized with survey measurements provide the "if"- statistical data and causal links, yet survey responses cannot provide the "why", or reasoning behind respondents' choices.

Recent models such as the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) call for a move away from the concept of "optimal" or "healthy" racial affiliation to delve deeper into the influences of African Americans' environment and the salience of race which shapes their beliefs and behaviors (Sellers, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous,

1998; Shelton & Sellers, 2000). While this theoretical perspective recognizes the complexity of racial identity, the model is still operationalized through the multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI) to allow for validity and reliability of constructs and to make generalizations to personality scales used for other ethnic groups (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Vandiver, Worrell, & Delgado-Romero, 2009). What is still lacking is the qualitative meaning behind survey items. The current research sought to provide in-depth meaning to the MIBI survey items by expanding the constructs as interview questions to produce direct discourse on students' beliefs about race.

While psychological studies have provided extensive understanding of racial identification, little emphasis in previous studies has been placed on the sociological aspects of racial identification as individuals mature and interact with others. If a deeper understanding of how race affects the African American student experience is the goal, then research must be focused on the social construction of one's racial identity. In the particular context of a PWI, such a racially subjective environment produces in-group variations for black students and calls for a step away from the homogeneous treatment of racial identity (Baber, 2012). Previous research has given evidence that African Americans display higher levels of collectivism when compared to whites (Celious & Oyserman, 2001), with scholars making assumptions regarding increased African American individualism, such as a desire to distance oneself from stereotypes related to the collective group (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). Because stereotypes are built upon assumptions of in-group sameness, Celious & Oyserman (2001) emphasize the need for

a heterogeneous racial group perspective. From this perspective, the concept of the black student community encompasses racism from outgroup members as well as connection to in-group members.

Noting that the majority of studies on the African American college experience focus little on within group differences, Harper and Nichols (2008) used the heterogeneous race model to study black males at three varying types of institutions. Their findings revealed six distinct subgroups for black males: athletes, fraternity members, socially-disengaged males, campus leaders/activists, males from suburban and predominantly white areas, and males from urban areas. While their study gave valuable insight to barriers for collectivism, it focused specifically on the black male student community. This current study explored the intersection of multiple sociocultural identities that play a role in the formulation of multidimensional racial identity for African American students specifically within a predominantly white environment.

Harper (2012) uses the term “minoritized” to emphasize the fact that individuals are not situated in minority status in every social context, but are yet subordinated into minority status within our white dominated institutions. While it is incorrect to suggest that all black students at PWIs will feel stigmatized (Chavous, 2000), it is important to acknowledge the historical context of racism which has shaped our institutions (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Higher education institutions, in their practices as well as the discourse created through published research, often treat the concept of racism as a forbidden subject. In an analysis of 255 peer-reviewed articles, only 16 of those articles significantly used the term racism or racist to describe campus environments for

minority students (Harper, 2012). Researchers instead substituted terminology such as alienating, hostile, marginalizing, chilling, unfriendly, discriminatory, unsupportive, and exclusionary. In the racial context of a PWI in which the subject of racism is treated as taboo, how are we to purely capture the racial realities of minoritized students?

Racial identity has historically included the construct of group identity, often referred to as reference group orientation (Sanders Thompson, 2001). Ascribed group identity, which can be imposed upon an individual often based on physical appearance, has been the focus of most black identity studies. In contrast, one's personally affirmed reference group allows one to determine their own desired group identity based on their worldview and perspective (Cross, 1991). Therefore, in the context of a PWI in which one chooses to attend as a student, what is the relation of black group membership, which can be viewed as ascribed group identity, with membership in the larger PWI community, which could be considered one's affirmed reference group? Particularly at a PWI, the dominant group's culture is established as the norm, which creates a social structure of rules by which other racial groups must function (Gusa, 2010). While previous research provides insight and plausible explanations for collectivism and individualism variance for whites and blacks, this dichotomous framework does not facilitate a more critical look at the dominance of whiteness and white privilege that remains so pervasive in institutional spaces. At many nationwide campuses which instill such a strong sense of ties to university traditions and norms, what occurs when those practices possibly conflict with or imply suppression of one's racial values?

Reference groups entail the various relationships between individuals and societal groups. In original studies of reference groups and human relations, Sherif describes the dilemma of association by stating, “When an individual has multiple reference groups, the norms of which conflict in various areas, he will sooner or later find himself in a situation where the norms of different reference groups point in different, even opposite directions” (1968, p. 84). Even in the seemingly progressive attempt to create a unified student body, there is a need to look critically at what group memberships black students hold and the social implications which are created when group memberships produce conflict. Institutions that avoid the topic of racism are in a sense affirming race neutral policies. Within a campus environment in which white privilege affects student life and campus traditions, the emphasis that students of color place on race might be devalued. Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that students and administrators on campuses who promote racial silence are rarely asked to share their racial realities. Experiential knowledge told through the experiences of those able to provide truths about their reality brings power to studies of race by allowing a deconstruction of oppressive discourse (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This study was designed to provide new insight on group membership by encouraging students to speak of their own realities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Various researchers study the role of college in shaping the identity of students. The dominant focus is on the psychological aspects of identity formation, with little emphasis on the influence of the social environment (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004).

Because the social context of one's environment can determine which aspects of an individual's identity are more or less prevalent at a given time (Sellers et. al, 1998), it is essential that the collegiate environment be used as the primary rather than secondary influence on students' identity development. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) discuss the role of college in the formation of what is known as the self-perceived or felt identity, in that college is an "arena of social interaction in which the individual comes in contact with a multitude of actors in a variety of settings" (p. 464). While their study highlighted the importance of approaching identity development in college from a social interaction approach, the variable of race was not systematically studied.

Social interaction of black students within an environment dominated by white students requires a systematic approach in order to emphasize the concept of diversity within diversity. This study acknowledged the underlying historical context of racism at PWIs and the spaces within those environments that frame African American students' perceptions. Using a case study methodology of the experiences of African American students at a PWI, this study provided a deeper understanding of the importance of race to individuals in an environment that is based on white norms and ideologies.

Integration of African American students who hold unique racial knowledge as part of a larger stigmatized group is multifaceted. Studies related to black students' integration into the campus environment emphasize involvement in the campus community in order for students to reach a sense of belonging and social and academic success (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

In relation to the broader concept of connectivity to a stigmatized group, this study followed the organizational involvement of black students to demonstrate how racial identity is construed through the groups with which they choose to identify. Students of color who feel that organizations on campus fail to reflect their interests involve themselves in subcultures whose members share similar beliefs and norms in a larger and perceived unwelcoming environment (Museus, 2008). African American students also participate in traditionally white organizations although their participation in such groups remains marginal at PWIs (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). In a study by Harper and Quaye (2007) of black students at PWIs, student leaders reported that they chose to participate in mainstream organizations to address the inadequate representation of African American students in those groups.

While quantitative data has established causal relationships between student involvement and connectedness to black identity (Parker & Flowers, 2003; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995), this study instead utilized a qualitative approach to explore the reasoning and connection between black student organization involvement and multidimensional identity. African American students hold membership in a multitude of reference groups: the larger societal racial group, the black student community within their institution, the general student body within their institution, and the student organizations in which they are involved. This study examined how all of those group affiliations are made salient specifically through the variance of activities and involvement for black students. Involvement may include mainstream or traditional organizations which cater to the dominant perspective of the student body as well as

racially-based organizations which allow for specific focus of concerns of the black student community.

Situational identity is fundamentally connected to the understanding of variability among black students and the core tenets that have effect on each individual's perceptual definition of what it means to be black. An individual's self-concept is considered to be made of stable components related to the values and judgments he or she makes regarding identity; one's identity also incorporates malleable or situational components which may change based on the context of a situation (Markus & Kunda, 1986). This is of particular importance in studying the variance of situations in which black students find themselves minoritized as well as part of a racial majority. The multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) has incorporated the comparative and uniquely situated contexts of African Americans to recognize the stable as well as situational aspects of racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). While the MMRI acknowledges the stable and situational components of one's understanding of race which determines how important race is in interpreting one's experiences (Shelton & Sellers, 2000), the model is still operationalized through the multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI).

The purpose of this study was to explore situational and stable components of African American identity by utilizing the MIBI's constructs as the basis for qualitative inquiry combined with observation data of the black student PWI experience. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What effect do the institutional norms and practices of a predominantly white institution have on the perceptions of African American students' views toward their race?
2. How do African American students at a predominantly white institution identify with various reference groups on campus in order to better understand the role of race in their lives?
3. How do the situational cues in the campus environment of a predominantly white institution interact with stable components of African American racial identity?

Using the MMRI as a framework, this study sought to better understand how African American students' self-concept is affected by the PWI collegiate environment. It is important to better explore how the stable components of racial identity interact with the situational cues that individuals receive from the environment. Racial identity must be viewed as a multidimensional construct of which many factors affect the ultimate outcome in the context of racialized institutional space. The MMRI follows the assumption that one's perceptions are the strongest indicators of racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Rather than reducing students' experiences and understandings of race to responses enlisted through the MIBI survey, this research utilized a qualitative process in which black students verbally gave their responses to each survey item to provide the necessary discourse on the racial realities of their environment. The study allowed for subjectivity, personal reflection, and deep description regarding how racial identity was manifested in the various groups in which they held membership.

## **Conclusion**

Studies within the body of literature on diversity and race in higher education often focus on outside forces which create barriers to access and participation in higher education; however, this research was conceptualized to utilize the valuable knowledge that our students can offer from within our colleges and universities. By engaging in research that operates outside of the white frame in which race is measured in quantifiable terms, I desired to contribute to scholarly knowledge that benefits from a constructivist approach in exploring the complexity of race. Feagin (2013) reflects on the lack of scientific inquiry regarding race outside of the dominant paradigmatic “box”:

Most mainstream social science analysis of racial matters is undertaken and accepted because it more or less conforms to the preferences of most elite decisionmakers. For this reason, many racial realities of this society have rarely or never been intensively researched by social scientists. (2013, p.4)

As a researcher invested in the value of epistemology which acknowledges multiple ways of knowing, my goal through use of case study methodology within a predominantly white environment was to provide an outlet for students to name their own reality. This approach can ultimately contribute to an understanding of multidimensional racial identity that can affect institutional policy. As Dr. John H. Jackson of the Schott Foundation for Public Education stated in a speech at the 2012 University Council for Educational Administration conference, “It’s not about making the back of the bus more comfortable and just creating more programs. Programs are progress, but policies are power.” This study contended to contribute to that power.

African American representation in higher education continues to show progress, but inclusion at some large-scale institutions in our country remains marginal, with some black student populations still representing single digit percentages. While theories have been created which systematically approach the necessary multidimensionality of racial identity that exists for individuals, gaps still remain in the body of knowledge that exists on in-group differences because these models are still operationalized from a quantitative perspective. If a black student circles “strongly disagree” in response to the survey item “I have a strong sense of belonging to black people,” how do we delve into the issues that create this dissonance, and what are the implications of such a response relative to their group memberships? What is the impact of multidimensionality on black student involvement, and how does a group’s overall perception hold influence on future members of that student community? While we often focus on the overall campus culture and climate of a particular institution, the subcontext of group identity may provide a more narrow scope regarding what stigmas remain in today’s institutions.

While it is understood that race is not a fixed or biological characteristic to be manipulated in research in order to imply the cause of racial distinctions, racial categories do relay the social construction of groups that have been developed throughout the history of this country. Therefore those generalized racial classifications will be referred to throughout this study within the intended historical context of the white racial frame. With reference to racial categories such as white, black, Asian, and Hispanic, the resolve is to focus on the ongoing ideological processes that continuously create issues of inequity and exclusion for those at the bottom of the racial ladder of

power in our institutions. This must be intentionally present in current research if we are to challenge the notions of a post-racial society and push to move beyond surface discourse and rhetoric regarding changes in higher education.

Du Bois (1903/1997) describes the existence of blacks in America as double-consciousness, in the sense that one is “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” (p. 38). Our country has evolved to reflect the multidimensionality of identity and the sociocultural construction of experiences which varies between individuals. Current realities might allow a sense of oneness for minoritized individuals in their sense of belonging to both cultures while others might exist with the combatant consciousness which Du Bois described. A methodical approach to the current racial realities of African Americans is still needed, particularly in the current context of blacks as a stigmatized social group which may or may not allow for movement beyond negative connotations of the inferiority of dark bodies. This study intended to call upon the voices of black students, and within their stories to speak of the strength that their experiences epitomize.

### **Definition of Terms**

The terms African American and black are used interchangeably. This terminology did not include the variability of black culture based on nationality (i.e., Dominican, African, Jamaican, etc.) due to the MMRI theoretical framing of the unique experiences of African Americans. Terms which refer to racial categories such as black and white will

be presented with lowercase lettering to emphasize those concepts as social constructions rather than fixed variables.

African American: a black American of African ancestry who relates to the unique and specific cultural experiences of being a citizen of the United States and who belongs to a stigmatized and oppressed racial group

Afrocentrism: theory of thought and action that places African interests and values at the center; devotion to African consciousness in relation to ethical behavior that represents opposition to all forms of oppression such as classism, patriarchy, and racism (Asante, 2003)

Culture: a societal perspective shared by a particular group, which includes actions, language, behaviors, and artifacts

Ethnicity: refers to ethnic identity that encompasses a type of group identity (distinct from racial identity) related to an individual's self-concept as a member of a social group made of individuals who share a connection based on culture and context which changes over time (Phinney & Ong, 2007)

Mainstream/traditional organization: a student organization at a college or university which reflects the ideas, attitudes, or activities of the principal or dominant trends of American society; also may reflect the dominant traditions of a specific institution based on white culture

Minoritized: alternative term to refer to students that do not always hold minority status within all social contexts but are categorized as so in situations and institutions in which they are underrepresented (Harper, 2012)

PWI: acronym which stands for predominantly white institution, a college or university which has an overrepresentation of white students

Racial identity: a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group; the psychological attachment that an individual creates in one of several socially constructed categories that are based on race, skin color, and/or a common history (Sanders Thompson, 2001)

Racially-based organization: a student organization at a college or university which is based on commonalities among members based on their race, ethnicity, culture, or other similar experiences

Student of color: a student who represents membership in a subgroup distinguished with racial categorization or ethnicity; a term utilized in place of the previous terminology "minority" to more appropriately reflect the social construction of race related to group affiliation based on oppression and power

White: a socially constructed group which includes individuals of European descent; the concept of whiteness emphasizes a historical context of superiority, oppression, and white privilege which has been upheld by individuals in this group, often deemphasizing race

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Numerous theorists have studied the social integration of various student populations to understand how students attain positive outcomes during college (McEwen, 2005). The black student experience has been documented through many avenues in order to outline the barriers to integration and equality that continue to be perpetuated in various institutional environments. Students who have been considered to be in the dominant group have a different developmental process than students of color; the concept of identity development was conceived from an ideal of “normalcy” based on the dominant group (Strange, 2005). In particular, because whiteness is often equated to the norm in society, white students are socialized from an early age as representing that norm (Tatum, 1997). While these individuals often can reach adulthood without considering themselves as members of a socially constructed racial group, black students exist in an alternate plane of constant awareness of “otherness,” perpetuated in their school settings as well as the larger societal context. African American students who perceive that their environment does not fit with their beliefs, interests, and cultural experiences will likely be reluctant to be involved in the social networks and campus organizations that they need to succeed (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995).

While an abundance of social and academic theories have been developed to address identity development for students during their journey through college, even the

most widely used theories must be deconstructed and understood in terms of the boundaries which confined their conception. Many renowned theorists based their research on samples of white, elite males without the consideration of socially constructed ideals such as gender or race (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). In order to establish a comprehensive picture of the unique experience of African American students, this chapter will outline the various theories and issues which affect the identity development of this subgroup. After a summary of developmental issues related to the institutional environment, race-critical theories, and the social construction of race and racial identity studies, the theoretical framework of the study will be outlined.

### **Climate, Culture, and the Campus Environment**

Renn (2004) in her study of multiracial identity development referenced Bronfenbrenner's ecological environment model to define the various structures within which students interact and develop. The largest structure, the macrosystem, involves the influence of social constructions, historical patterns, and cultural trends of the larger society. This system eventually is scaled down to the smallest unit of structure, the microsystem, a particular setting consisting of symbolic features within which a student builds personal relationships. Numerous microsystems within an institution, such as classroom settings, residential halls, student organizations, and friendship circles make up what Renn refers to as the "macrosystem of peer culture." She deems this system as having the most significant influence on student development as individuals determine their congruence within these settings. Beyond this ideal of peer culture, it is also

important to outline the ideal of organizational culture. Culture is defined as the values and patterns of basic assumptions which are developed by a group and taught to new members as the appropriate response to organizational stimuli (Schein, 1990). Tierney (1988) delineates organizational culture as the shared assumptions solidified through “stories, special language norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes that emerge from individual and organizational behavior” (p. 4).

Individuals respond differently to socialization into the culture of an organization (Schein, 1990); it is therefore essential that consideration be made to the effect of symbolic values that do not match an individual’s own values and beliefs. This is particularly important for students of color who perceive that the traditions, values, and principles perpetuated in the campus environment are incongruent to their unique sociohistorical perspectives. Climate is often known as the manifestation of culture, with climate referring to common perceptions and attitudes about current organizational life (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Assessment of campus climate, the observable practices and behaviors within an institution, allows a surface glimpse or snapshot of the embedded culture, which includes the attitudes and values shared by group members over time (Chavous, 2005). Climate is associated with four dimensions: the inclusion or exclusion of racial groups, numerical representation of racial/ethnic groups, psychological climate involving attitudes and perceptions among groups, and the behavioral climate based on intergroup relations (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Rather than focusing solely on increasing numeric representation of underrepresented groups, colleges and universities must also be dedicated to challenging historical

legacies that create negative climate perceptions for members of the campus community (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999).

In order to fully capture the developmental issues of black students, it is imperative to examine institutional culture as well as climate, as both concepts are vital in their influence on integration into the campus environment. Members of subgroups centered on socially constructed concepts such as gender or race will perceive the climate and institutional support differently based on their particular perspective. For example, previous studies have revealed that white students perceive greater level of university support than students of color. However, students of color consider not only individual interactions but also the structural factors of the institution in evaluating how racial attitudes are manifested in the campus climate (Chavous, 2005). The complexity of the campus environment necessitates a more expansive examination of the forces associated with specific institutional types which form students' perceptions.

### **Higher Education Access**

The exclusion of African Americans in the educational system can be traced back to the denial of schooling for slaves and the fact that before the Civil War the education of African Americans was illegal (Cole, 2006). With federal government assistance, the second Morrill Act of 1890 provided financial support for the education of African Americans at "separate but equal" institutions, which came to be known as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). The most widely known fight against educational exclusion came through the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision which attempted to force increased financial provisions for separate

black schools, followed by increased civil rights activism to fight injustices and institutional resistance to inclusion (Peterson, Blackburn, Gamson, Arce, Davenport, & Mingle, 1978; Walters, 2001). African American students have historically been engaged in a constant battle for equal footing and integration into the higher education system.

Even as black students slowly gained admittance to PWIs, those campuses presented patterns of exclusion, racism, and internal discrimination (Peterson et al., 1978). HBCUs, while before integration offered the only educational opportunity for blacks, have continuously been hailed as institutional spaces that contrastingly provide a positive climate for students who felt outcast or shunned from other institutional types. Tobolowsky, Outcalt, and McDonough (2005) posit that HBCUs “offer students a solid education in a nurturing environment- one in which their intellectual ability is not automatically questioned and their presence on campus is not part of an acrimonious debate” (p. 63). Even though PWIs currently educate the majority of black students in the United States, today’s higher education system is greatly influenced by the social and political structures founded on the concept of black inferiority (St. John, Rowley, & Hu, 2009). PWIs have been categorized as failing to successfully retain and socially integrate students of color for several reasons. First, concepts of academic success and created retention programs are based on white ideals of cognitive functioning and achievement. Second, programs and practices at PWIs often fail to include the unique experiences of students of color that influence their cognitive development (Gregory, 2000). Increased access to PWIs is but a single portion of the fight against educational inequality.

Due to admission policies and national discourse on access and equality, greater numbers of minority students who have been historically underrepresented are attending PWIs (Chavous, 2005). In attempts to maintain their power, individuals have argued against the use of legal policies designed to address practices which denied African Americans of equal educational opportunities (Feagin, 2000; Walters, 2001). While affirmative action policies sought to allow greater access to students who were historically denied enrollment or underrepresented in campus demographics, students representing the majority began to claim reports of reverse discrimination and spoke against the use of race in admission policies. The *Hopwood v. University of Texas* case rejected the importance of diversity in education, attesting that a student body that looks different has no rational meaning or educational value (Gurin et al., 2002). In 2003, *Gratz v. Bollinger* deemed the assigning of points based on race in the admission process as a violation of equal protection under the 14th Amendment. However, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* case upheld diversity as an important measure which universities should seek to affirm, thus giving proponents of affirmative action evidence for continued support (Morfin et al., 2006).

Affirmative action as explored critically by various scholars in academia has become a mechanism to stall racial progress. In past cases of affirmative action Supreme Court justices have referred to racial diversity as just one factor among other forms of diversity. The way in which this discourse has been framed has worked to remove institutional policy from the responsibility of addressing white supremacy and racism. In this context, diversity acts in accordance to the status quo framing which

Moore and Bell (2011) describe, as it “feeds into the color-blind notion that to be black or white or a top French horn player or from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan are all equally important elements of difference” (p. 602). Affirmative action cases are just part of the critical debate regarding the role of racial diversity and resistance against the fight for equality for black students. As the debate continues over access in today’s colleges and universities, data regarding the effect of the racial climate on students’ development is needed.

### **Defining Racism**

The presence of racial discrimination at PWIs has caused high levels of attrition and a low level of satisfaction with the social aspects of collegiate life for African American students (Chavous, 2000). Racial discrimination is known as the socially organized practices which deny students of color the opportunities, position, and rewards of whites (Gusa, 2010). While PWIs have made efforts to address racial discrimination in the attempt to make campus environments more inclusive for all students, emphasis must be placed on these schools’ foundations of white cultural ideologies (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Although African American students are no longer subjected to overt discriminatory laws of the past, they now must deal with subtle forms of discrimination due to informal norms and social networks based on white ideologies (Feagin et al., 1996). Racism does not have to be an explicit practice but is historically embedded in the culture, traditions, and policies of PWIs. In regard to PWI campus climate, students of color have reportedly experienced a prevalence of racism (Gusa, 2010). Feagin (2013) in his analysis of journals from white students as well as students

of color revealed how the dominant racial frame was embedded into images, attitudes, and events pervasively present in their collegiate setting. Racism is a reality for all students that must be fully acknowledged.

The ideal of racism has incurred much debate on its definition, and it is important to distinguish between individual acts and the larger power structure which has built systems of inequality. Feagin (2000) refers to racism as the systemic and institutionalized patterns of discrimination in our country. Other definitions of racism incorporate the idea that racial prejudice combined with various social, economic, and cultural powers produce institutionalized practices (Tatum, 1997). Racism is addressed mainly in terms of the negative outcomes it creates in disadvantaging people of color; however, it is rarely viewed in terms of the benefits it affords to individuals who maintain systems of inequality (Rains, 1998). If racism is only studied in terms of the negative outcomes of racism, the privileges of those who benefit from a social hierarchy based on inequalities can be ignored (Rains, 1998). The inclusion of institutional power in the definition of racism allows discourse to focus on the underlying benefits that whites receive from institutional practices (Leonardo, 2009).

Many scholars argue that the term individual racism is contradictory in that racism refers to the power of a group (Essed & Goldberg, 2002). Feagin (2000) acknowledges the consequences of practices that maintain a racial hierarchy. His concept of systemic racism is aligned with the ideal of racism for the purpose of this study, in that his synthesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the cyclical process of power. Systemic racism is outlined through the following areas:

- Racist prejudices (emotions)
- Racist stereotypes, images and ideology (cognitive)
- Racist actions by whites
- Institutional and embedded practices of racism
- Impact: white wealth, power and privilege
- Impact: economic, health, community, and family costs
- Active individual and community resistance to racism (Feagin, 2006; Feagin, 2010)

Feagin (2013) emphasizes the inappropriate metaphor of racism as a cancer being spread through American society and instead accurately gives historical data that posits racism as the structural foundation of the United States. In this theoretical framing, racism can be analyzed through the unjust enrichments that it affords whites as well as the unjust impoverishments that it establishes as generational to people of color.

Another contribution of his conceptual definition of systemic racism is the acknowledgement of resistance to racism in which communities of color become engaged. The accounts which black students provide about their racial realities and engagement against injustice in their immediate environment is vital in challenging institutional norms that affirm power and oppression.

Systematic racism is referenced by scholars in the discourse of day-to-day interactions within an institutional setting. Essed and Goldberg (2002) cite Rowe in addressing forms of racism “within the specificity of the ‘ethos’ or sociocultural environment of the organization” (p.179). The concept of systematic racism is further

delineated with the term everyday racism. Everyday racism includes socialized ideals of racism into meanings that make practices definable, practices of racism that become familiar and repetitive, and underlying racial and ethnic relations that are reinforced through the familiar practices of everyday situations. The concept of everyday racism acknowledges that racism does not have to include direct contact; it can also be through indirect actions such as implementation of policies and communications that reinforce racial injustices (Essed & Goldberg, 2002). Because the subject of racism is often avoided in higher education and treated as a taboo subject in scholarly research, it is essential that students be allowed to articulate their own understandings of the role of race and racism in their experiences.

### **Race-Critical Theories**

Traditional theories conceptualized reality as one universal way of knowing which can be proved with evidence; the progression of scientific inquiry has recognized that multiple realities exist which can be understood in a variety of contexts (Hays & Singh, 2012). Paradigms such as critical theory challenge norms on what is considered valid knowledge by recognizing that the knower is the one that constructs reality through his or her experiences (Kilgore, 2001). Because people hold different positions regarding the world, socially constructed concepts such as gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity must be encompassed in reality to make sense of the power structures that lead to oppression and privilege (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Race critical theories give voice to participants by allowing them to give accounts which counter the normalized ways of thinking that often perpetuate discriminatory practices (Solorzano et al., 2000).

## **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) takes the position that racism is deeply embedded in the legal and political structures of our society (Morfin, et al., 2006). Branching from critical legal studies which explored inconsistencies of laws and policies which favored the dominant race, CRT came into existence as an outcry against the false progress presented by the civil rights movement (Parker, 1998). Scholar Derrick Bell was fundamental in linking the work of critical studies to the premise that racism is a permanent fixture of American life (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Recognizing that American institutions are founded on normative standards of whiteness, CRT is used as a framework to explain the marginalization of people of color (Parker, 1998). Six tenets represent the foundational principles of CRT:

1. Racism is endemic to American life.
2. Skepticism should be applied toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.
3. Critical race theory insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; the presumption is that racism has contributed to contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society.
5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary.
6. Critical race theory works toward eliminating racial oppression (Morfin et al., 2006).

Storytelling is a major tool of CRT, in that CRT relies on the experiential knowledge told through the experiences of those able to provide truths about their reality (Delgado Bernal, 2002). The use of voice, otherwise known as “naming your reality,” brings power to studies of race by allowing a deconstruction of oppressive discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In acknowledging that laws continue to benefit those in power, the role of storytelling for those who might add better understanding and interpretation to racial and gender inequalities becomes extremely important (Parker, 1998). The unique testimonies and counterstories that oppressed groups can contribute stand as an impactful aide in understanding and validating the oppressive forces that they experience (Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Critical theories seek to acknowledge the disparities built in the educational system. Critical race theory can provide narratives from students of color to give deeper insight to the causes of their exclusion (Parker, 1998). Legal criticisms have been made against the use of storytelling in critical race studies, with critics suggesting that narratives are subjective and therefore unreliable; however, the use of a critical epistemological lens views knowledge as situated and recognizes the multiple ways of knowing (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Critical theorists use the exchange of stories to construct social reality through interpretive structures and to counter the silencing of marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For example, LatCrit, another theory similar to CRT, challenges issues of sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression through an expression of Latina/Latino experiences. With the tenets of CRT, scholars attempt to challenge the traditional paradigms used in research and to extend the

discourse on racism and discrimination to a wide variety of research areas (Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT is critical in addressing the systemic and systematic forms of oppression which affect African Americans within their institutional settings.

### **Institutional Space and Whiteness**

In terms of campus climate, space and time have a significant impact on the African American student experience. Racialized spaces are specific areas on campus that are defined by various cultural biases, and time refers to the collective memories shared within a group (Feagin et al., 1996). In her study of experiences of students of color at elite law schools, Moore (2008) explained the concept of white institutional space using the following components: racist exclusions of people of color in law schools and positions of power within legal institutions, a white frame that organizes logic within the institutions, a curriculum historically constructed and based on elite white thinking, and the claim that law is a neutral and impartial doctrine unrelated to power. While her study focused on elite law schools, the concepts can be applied to the educational settings of PWIs which are founded on white norms. In terms of racialized space, collective definitions of belonging are created through the symbolic meanings associated with white spaces on campus (Feagin et al., 1996). Additionally, historical prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion which shaped current institutions must be acknowledged.

Moore (2008) found that students of color encountered racism as they navigated their way through white institutional spaces. Students of color dealt with racist insults hidden under the premise of colorblindness. Also, students and even faculty of color had

to create institutional conditions and networks which countered white institutional spaces in order to be successful. Finally, students often had to function under the guise of invisibility to avoid racist discussions, causing them to be silenced, thus perpetuating white norms. Moore's study of elite law schools is an example of how racism was deeply embedded in the practices and norms of the institution, requiring students of color to constantly maneuver through white spaces in their everyday encounters. The racism that students of color face is often reflected in the experiences of faculty of color as well. Stanley (2006) in a study of faculty of color found that individuals' credibility and authority were often questioned in the classroom, and faculty in various spaces and departments felt the need to "overprove" their worth in the academy. The ways in which people of color are judged against a dominant narrative of normalcy must be addressed, particularly in the context of PWIs where African Americans are underrepresented.

Many theories have been developed to systematically outline ideologies which affirm the socially constructed white race as superior and the strategies incorporated to maintain power. Incorporating documentation on the historical racist founding of America, Feagin (2013) encompasses a wide range of principles on systemic racism and white ideologies into what he deems as the white racial frame. He comprehensively defines this framing as a social tool used by individuals to interpret and make meaning of the world: "The white racial frame includes a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, interlinked interpretation and narratives, and visual images. It also includes racialized emotions and racialized reactions to language accents and imbeds inclinations to discriminate" (2013, p. xi). Because the white racial frame

over centuries has been built on a positive orientation to whiteness and a negative orientation to “others” so omnipresent in the attitudes of whites, its dominance can influence the cognitive framing of people of color as well. Gusa (2010) coined the term white institutional presence (WIP) to conceptualize how white ideologies such as white ascendancy, monoculturalism, white blindness, and white estrangement are embedded into the design and organization of an institution’s environment. WIP recognizes the power of white ideologies: “Just as an online teacher cannot be seen, but his or her presence affects the academic discourse, the presence of whiteness and privilege within policies and practices may go unseen. Nevertheless, it detrimentally shapes students’ social and academic experiences” (p. 467).

The concept of white ideologies as invisible is particularly important in that students of color are often expected to conform to the norms set by the dominant group and then judged negatively when their behaviors or values are not congruent with those standards. WIP not only creates specific avenues for discrimination and racism through interactions in the campus environment, but it also affects institutional policy and access for students of color as well. Admissions policies are based on standardized tests established on the ideal of objectivity; however, critical discourse acknowledges the influence of white privilege and ideology embedded in the language of testing materials (Gusa, 2010). In addition, Stanley (2010) asserts that retention policies and decision-making are overwhelmingly determined through quantitative research methodology which favors generalizations instead of the counterstories and narratives represented in qualitative studies. These accounts make it all the more essential to examine white

institutional space from the perspective of black students, specifically through the use of methodology which allows for discourse and analysis of the racialized practices of campus life.

### **White Privilege and Colorblindness**

In the context of institutionalized racism, it is important to note that all racism does not have to be overt; many forms of racism are deeply embedded into the consciousness of individuals (Essed & Goldberg, 2002). Dyconsciousness refers to the impaired or distorted ways of looking at race that stem from uncritical habits of the mind (Rains, 1998). The distorted ways in which individuals accept the existing order of institutional practices perpetuates the existence of inequities. White socialization entails the ways through which whites receive messages of the hierarchy of race from an early age (Leonardo, 2009). Whites develop racial knowledge and a sense of belonging in two ways: whites are born into a world with which their sense of self is racially harmonious, and their sense of entitlement is founded on the belief that the world belongs to them (Leonardo, 2009). In terms of white privilege, white individuals often choose to ignore the racial aspects of their identity. This is a concept known as transparency, which allows them to detach themselves from thinking about their privilege (Lopez, 2006). Such a freedom of thought stands in conflict with the constant presence of race consciousness which African American students often address in their daily lives.

White privilege can be described as unjust assets under the cloak of invisibility, or the system of opportunities that has been bestowed on individuals because they are white (McIntosh, 1993; Delgado Bernal, 2002). Because whites most often benefit from

racial privileges, they rarely think about their racial identity (Lopez, 2006). White privilege is not about ignorance. Leonardo (2009) elaborates that when whites feel threatened, they use their racial knowledge to speak out in explicit ways; however, when situations preserve their white privilege, they invoke attitudes that appear to be race neutral. Privilege for whites is invisible and thus viewed as the norm in society; therefore individuals who represent identities and experiences in opposition to what is considered the norm are devalued or marginalized (Delgado Bernal, 2002). White privilege is not a term restricted to the specific benefits that white individuals have; it also deals with the social structures of a country that since its inception has been based on norms of white superiority and preferences (Feagin, 2000).

White individuals, in response to racism, often respond in what they believe to be nonthreatening and therefore nonracist ways. Rains (1998) refers to these “benign” responses as the reasoning white individuals provide as reactions to racism in ways that maintain and reinforce their white privilege. Examples of these responses are eliciting a sense of entitlement, providing exceptions to downplay racism, and maintaining colorblindness or race neutrality. Whites often justify inequalities by claiming that they deserve rewards based on their hard work. This argument implies that rewards must be protected so that they will not be taken away by blacks, who are less deserving (Rains, 1998). An illustration of providing exceptions is the concept of Asian Americans as the “model student” (Leonardo, 2009). Asian American success in the educational system is often used as a means to prove the “fairness” of the educational system to other students of color, with the insistence that they too could achieve such success through hard work

and the necessary desire to do so (Feagin, 2000). Whites use their racial knowledge in ways that suggest their innocence in racist behavior, as seen in recent race-conscious admissions cases through which individuals claim reverse discrimination.

Colorblindness refers to attempts of individuals to claim that they use race neutral and therefore nonracist behavior. Individuals who preserve white privilege have maintained that the Constitution is colorblind; however, the authors of the Constitution explicitly documented slaves as three-fifths of a human and repeatedly used terminology to protect the system of African American enslavement (Feagin, 2000). Colorblindness implies one or more of the following ideals: racism as a declining significance, blame placed on people of color for inequalities, success and failure attributed to individual merit, downplay of slavery legacies, racism as an exception to the rule, and emphasis on social progress (Leonardo, 2009). Colorblind responses not only relieve whites from responsibility for unequal treatment, they also deny the recognition of the values, identities, and histories of persons of color (Rains, 1998). While colorblindness attempts to assert that race should not prevent equality, in actuality it serves as an argument to exclude race from social policy. Herein lays the complexity of the colorblind argument:

Colorblindness continues to retard racial progress. It does so for a simple reason: It focuses on the surface, on the bare fact of racial classification, rather than looking down into the nature of social practices. It gets racism and racial remediation exactly backward, and insulates new forms of race baiting.

(Leonardo, 2009, p. 131)

Institutions that avoid the topic of racism are in a sense affirming colorblind and race neutral policies. Within a campus environment in which white privilege affects student life and campus traditions, the emphasis that students of color place on race might be devalued.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Racism particularly in today's society is not only overt and blatant but typically exists in covert and subtle ways. These subtle behaviors can be defined as racial microaggressions (Solorzano et al., 2000). Stereotype threat focuses on the negative stereotypes placed on one's racial group that have the ability to create immediate situational threats for individuals. Steele (2010) developed the term "stereotype threat" from the idea of stigmatizations or stereotype vulnerability; this concept explores the effects of the threat of judgment or treatment in a situation based on one's group identity. More specifically, African Americans face the threat of being judged and possibly confirming negative stereotypes regarding group ability when performing intellectual tasks. This threat can in turn interfere with their intellectual performance and ability in that immediate situation (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Individuals in attempts to disprove stereotypes in some instances perform better; however, the task of addressing the negative stereotype is added to the tasks that the individuals already must attend to in their environment (Steele, 2010).

The concept of stereotype threat is linked to negative consequences of minority group representation such as tokenism (Steele & Aronson, 1995). At PWIs where African American students are underrepresented, they are often tokens, meaning that

they are perceived more as symbols of their race rather than individuals. Tokenism can lead to increased stress for individuals having minority status and can also perpetuate existing stereotypes (Hurtado et al., 1999). In a study of African American students in which participants were asked to state their preference regarding stereotypical activities (such as sports or music), many participants attempted to distance themselves from stereotypes regarding African Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotypes placed on groups can also be displayed in the negative beliefs cast on individuals simply due to their race. Steele (2010) includes the narrative of a young African American, Brent Staples, who experienced this phenomenon while walking in the streets of Chicago:

I'd been walking the streets grinning good evening at people who were frightened to death of me. I did violence to them just by being... Out of nervousness I began to whistle and discovered I was good at it... On the street at night I whistled the popular tunes from the Beatles and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The tensions drained from people's bodies when they heard me. A few even smiled as they passed me in the dark. (p. 6)

This illustration provides a vivid example not only of the stereotypes placed upon African Americans in their everyday interactions with others, but also the mechanisms they often employ in confirming their belonging and negating those stereotypes. Within predominantly white environments, there must be a critical look at the mechanisms African American students utilize to counter stereotypes and negotiate their fit in the social environment.

## **The Ideal of Race and Racial Identity**

Race has been historically approached as a biological construct, which has implications in the study of areas such as racial disparities, health distinctions, and educational equalities among racial groups. As discussed in the previous chapter, the socially constructed ideal of race was fabricated as a biological fact to support individuals' assertion of a superior white race (Gould, 1996). As Harding (1993) relays, "race appears as a symbolic system in which black, brown, yellow, red, and dark signify evil, ignorance, danger, and pollution, and white and light signify good, knowledge, safety and purity" (p. 12). The notion of otherness was utilized by whites to colonize and conquer various lands, most widely known in America as the slave trade during which millions of people from Africa were taken into captivity. Racial classification was utilized worldwide by the white race to conquer and "civilize" those who they wished to dominate. The ideal of "archaeological positivism" refers to the assumptions of white superiority used to overthrow the intellectual accomplishments and advancement of Egyptian and other ancient cultures (Bernal, 1993). Objectivity has repeatedly been equated to studies of cultural differences, even as whites sought to provide scientific evidence of the inferiority of blacks (Gould, 1996).

Through social sciences such as anthropology, the ideal of cultural relativism began to call into question the claimed objectivity and moral justification used by the dominant group to deem others as inferior. Cultural relativism (Marcus & Fischer, 1999; Robbins, 1997) states that behaviors found in other cultures cannot be judged as wrong just because they are different from a normalized standard; instead, they must be

understood in relation to the culture in which they are embedded. The evolution of how race and cultural studies in which multiple realities and ways of knowing have progressively been recognized in research has significant implications for the study of black racial identity. Scholars in the social sciences eventually began to call for discourse to be centered on racial oppression rather than racial relations to truly challenge oppressive structures (Steinberg, 2007). All of these social perspectives generated racial oppression and identity models which focused on power and racism. Psychology models which were established on the normative behavior of whites created a framing of the original black identity models around a deficient or inferior approach to understanding black personality (White & Parham, 1990). Models of racial identity have continued to evolve to recognize black individuals not through otherness but through their own cultural perspectives.

Racial identity can be described as the significance and meaning individuals place on race based on certain socially constructed criteria (Helms, 1990). Particularly for African Americans, the heterogeneous nature of their experiences with race in the United States created considerable variability in the significance of being a member of the black racial group (Sellers et. al, 1998). Two approaches exist in regard to the ways in which African Americans shape their racial identity: mainstream and underground. The mainstream approach to racial identity seeks to understand the universal social processes that define group membership. The early work of black racial identification focused on how groups are stigmatized and develop cognitive structures based on prejudiced behavior (Sellers et. al, 1998). Because racial identity was seen as stable

across time, the emphasis was placed on making comparisons across different racial and ethnic groups with no regard for the unique experiences of African Americans (Shelton & Sellers, 2000).

The underground approach to racial identity appeared in the late 1960s, when psychologists sought to redefine African American racial identification with the specific cultural experiences of individuals belonging to the black race. Because a conflict existed between being a “Negro” in the negative view of America and an individual’s view of self, racial identity focused on how African Americans could develop a healthy self-concept (Sellers et. al, 1998). Racial identity was viewed more as a personality trait with a qualitative approach to one’s attitudes and beliefs about African Americans in society (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). While this approach gave greater weight to the qualitative description of racial identity, research has still relied on the stable nature of racial identity over time (Sanders Thompson, 2001). Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, the term “nigrescence” explained the “conversion” African Americans went through to overcome negative images of self-worth placed on them by white society (Parham, 1989). The Nigrescence model of racial identity developed by Cross (1991) has been highly referenced in explaining the process through which African Americans move from negative to positive dispositions in respect to their race. The five stages of this model and the experiences they encompass are as follows:

1. Pre-Encounter: As a minority, beliefs and ideals are based on the Euro-American values regarding ethnicity. African American culture is believed to be inferior and individuals try to fit into mainstream society.

2. Encounter: A major racial encounter such as discrimination causes a shift in thoughts about race, and this realization causes prior beliefs to be questioned.
3. Immersion-Emersion: An individual focuses on intense learning about the African American culture and excludes all beliefs other than those with an African American focus.
4. Internalization: Values and beliefs from African American and white cultures are merged together as an individual becomes sensitive to different racial groups.
5. Internalization-Commitment: A commitment is made to accept all cultures and to use Afrocentric awareness to put unifying beliefs into action. (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001)

While the use of racial identity theories has aided in exploring the positive ways in which individuals have overcome racism, stage theory is problematic for several reasons (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). In studying racial identity under the assumption of racial stigmatization and the psychological effects of racial inferiority, stage models of racial identity imply that there is a healthy versus an unhealthy mental development that African Americans must reach (Sellers et al., 1998). Also, most studies have assumed a correlation between personal identity and group orientation; in this regard someone having low self-esteem is assumed to have negative feelings toward the racial group to which the individual belongs (Sanders Thompson, 2001). However, because individuals have multiple identities which they rely on in their self-concept, it is possible that their core identity is not highly correlated with racial group identity (Cross, 1991).

In understanding the nature of racial identification for African Americans, each approach provides insight into the complexity of the subject. While the mainstream approach highlights racial identity formation in context to other identities present in an individual, the underground approach provides better understanding of experiences with being African American that create variations in how individuals identify with the group (Sellers et. al, 1998). Combining the two approaches allows for the acknowledgment that self-concept has both situational and stable properties. This dual nature of the self-concept has been described as “organized and consistent but also fluid” (Markus & Kunda, 1986, p. 858). Existing studies focus on either showing how identity is stable across situations or on behavior variability based on the salience of a particular event (Shelton & Sellers, 2000); little research has been done which focuses on the combined aspects of situational variability and stability.

### **Self-Concept and Reference Group Orientation**

The idea of self-concept has been linked to racial identification and the ways in which people see themselves based on affiliation with a racial group (Sanders Thompson, 2001). Therefore it is important to frame this study with a conceptual understanding of how the idea of self-concept has informed racial identity studies. During the evolution of black identification studies, the majority of psychologists and scientists focused on the following equation: SC (self-concept) = GI (group identity) + PI (personal identity) (Cross, 1991). In studies in the field of sociology regarding racial identity, GI is often referred to as reference group orientation, or RGO. Self-concept has been conceptualized as a two factor theory combining aspects of RGO and PI.

Researchers use reference group orientation to determine the extent to which a particular group guides an individual's behavior, thoughts, and attitudes (Helms, 1990). Reference group orientation includes concepts such as racial identity, group identity, race awareness, racial ideology, race evaluation, race esteem, race image, and racial self-identification (Cross, 1991). The concept of personal identity relates to the thought that all humans exhibit components of behavior that can be placed on a continuum. Personal identity has been linked to concepts such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, self-evaluation, interpersonal competence, levels of anxiety, and tendency of introversion or extroversion (Cross, 1991).

While the  $SC = PI + RGO$  theory has produced significant strides in understanding black identity, several problematic issues have been associated with the way it is used. First, while the equation implies a combination of both personal identity and reference group orientation, most studies have been designed only to measure one of those constructs (Cross, 1991). Second, in PI studies personality is thought to have universal elements regardless of race, and the personality scales used make no reference to race or nationality. This means that race is treated as an independent variable only considered in analysis to determine if race is statistically significant for comparison groups (Cross, 1991). And although RGO studies have focused on race as a dependent and intentional variable in studying group identity, both PI and RGO have been overwhelmingly measured through survey instruments. Finally, even though most studies only produce data about either PI or RGO separately, the assumption has been consistently made that PI and RGO are correlated ( $PI \times RGO$ ) (Cross, 1991). For

example, it has long been assumed that a black individual with low self-esteem has a negative group identity. The assumption is that someone who rejects membership in their racial group will form tendencies of self-estrangement and maladaptive behavior (Smith, 1989).

Recent studies show that blacks form their identity in association with a variety of groups (based on sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc.) (Cross, 1991). Group identity is therefore not a prediction of personal identity but rather insight to one's worldview (Sanders Thompson, 2001). Even though PI and RGO can be uncorrelated and independent of each other (i.e., one can have low self-esteem but have strong ties and high regard of black culture due to centrality in some other form of identity), they are both important in understanding how individuals form their self-concept (Cross, 1991). Because the MMRI acknowledges personal identity and group orientation aspects of racial identity, its use can provide significant qualitative data needed to better understand the African American student experience.

The concept of reference group orientation can be studied in relation to the climate formed in the collegiate environment. While in college, each student ultimately is associated with their institution based on their enrollment, i.e., each student becomes a member of that community and the traditions and symbols it entails. This study incorporated reference group orientation to explore the situational cues that African American students experience. Identity formation occurs in specific ways during college; and although most components of one's self-concept are stable, the situational variations of identity occur when one responds to specific events in the social

environment (Markus & Kunda, 1986). College has been studied in the sense that the particular structure of its environment can impress upon the identities formed before college (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). The makeup of the actors and actions within a collegiate environment therefore play a significant role in student identity, particularly the racial identity of African American students.

Reference group theory is used widely in social psychology as the extent to which one relates to a particular group. Reference group orientation deals with the values, symbols, and events which shape the attitudes and behaviors of a particular group with which one associates (Cross, 1991). Reference groups can take on many forms. In one sense, reference groups can be those which an individual chooses for comparison when evaluating his or her self-image. Alternately, a reference group can give insight into which group an individual seeks to gain or maintain acceptance. And last, a reference group can refer to the group through which social frames of reference are used by an individual to create his or her own perceptions (Smith, 1989). In contrast to the assumption made in original studies of racial identity, one's reference group does not have to be the racial group to which one belongs (Helms, 1990). This concept is emphasized in the study of people's ability to align themselves with other groups with which they are directly associated. Cross further exemplifies this ideal:

It is possible, for example, for everyone to describe a subject (ex. A black man) as a member of a certain group or culture (ex. black society), but that group may have little effect on his attitudes or ideas. As a matter of fact, the group to which the subject aspires and from which he adopts a perspective can be a group to

which few others would classify him as a member (for example white society).  
(1991, p. 125)

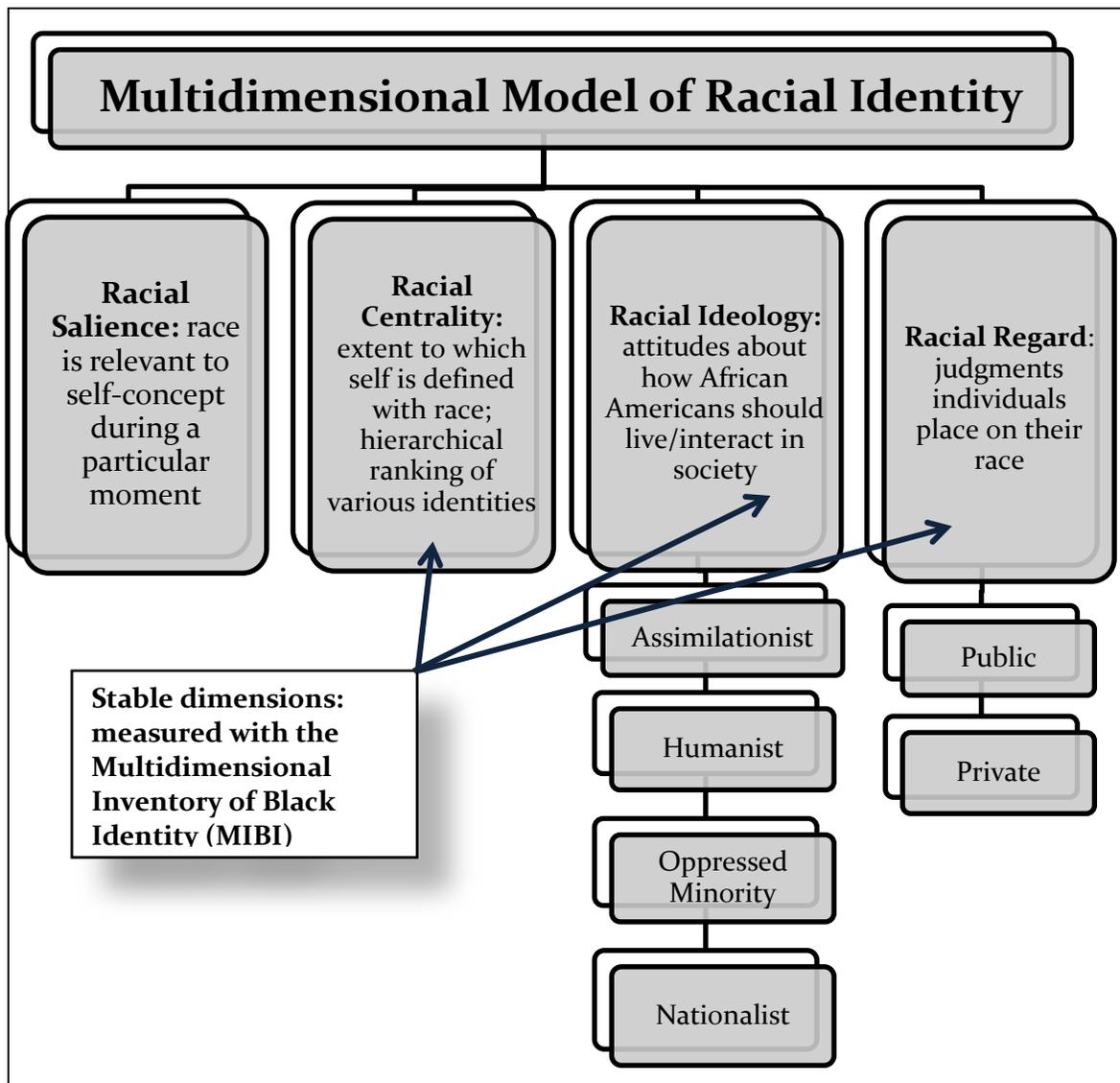
The collegiate environment of a PWI can act as a reference group for African American students in one of the forms described. This concept provides several inquiries of reflection related to black identity development. Which groups do African American students use as comparisons in reflecting on their own self-image? In which groups do African American students desire to gain acceptance? And what events within the collegiate environment are used as a frame of reference as African American students build their own perceptions? These various forms of reference group orientation will reveal the racial climate of the PWI which students distinguish through their experiences.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identification**

The multidimensional model of racial identification (MMRI) combines the mainstream and underground approaches of racial identity to illustrate both the stable and situational aspects of racial identity (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Using a phenomenological approach, the MMRI looks at perceptions of the meaning and significance of race for African Americans (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). The MMRI is a framework which can be used to understand the significant role race plays in the self-concepts of African Americans as well as to acknowledge the qualitative meanings individuals place on being part of a racial group (Sellers et. al, 1998). There are four assumptions of the MMRI. First, the model assumes that identity

is both situationally influenced as well as stable. Second, self-concept includes a number of identities including race, all of which are ordered hierarchically based on differences within each individual (Sellers et al, 1998). Third, the MMRI is phenomenological in the sense that one's perceptions are the strongest indicators of racial identity. Subjectivity is desired over objective indicators. Finally, racial identity is complex in nature with all dimensions creating a picture of the status of one's identity rather than the development of identity through stages (Sellers et. al, 1998) (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework: The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity**

Four dimensions make up the MMRI: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. By combining all of these dimensions, a complex and multidimensional understanding of one's outlook on race is created which combines the situational and stable aspects of racial identity (Baber, 2012). The first dimension, racial

salience, refers to the extent that an individual's race is relevant to his or her self-concept during a particular moment in time or specific situation. This dimension entails the situational aspect of racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Because racial salience is the dimension related to the specific context of a situation, it is significant in that salience can create predictions in how individuals will respond when placed in various circumstances (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial salience is theorized on the premise that not all African American individuals will respond the same in specific situations because they hold different outlooks on the various dimensions of racial identity. Racial centrality as the second dimension is closely related to salience in that it is the extent to which individuals define themselves with regard to their race. Centrality is considered to be stable across situations and recognizes the hierarchical ranking of the various identities that make up each person's core self-concept (Rowley et al., 1998). The MMRI differs from previous models which assume race as central to African American identity, acknowledging a shift from ascribed identity to recognize variance in normatively defining oneself according to race (Sellers et al., 1998).

The third dimension, racial ideology, represents the beliefs and attitudes a person has regarding the ways in which African Americans should live and interact with others in society. Four philosophies are established in relation to one's racial ideology:

- Nationalist: The belief that the African American experience is unique and distinct from other racial groups. This philosophy entails the notion that African Americans should be in control of their own destiny, with minimal input from other groups.

- Oppressed Minority: The common experiences between African Americans and other groups that have experienced oppression. This view is often expressed in the desire to form coalitions between groups to bring about social change.
- Assimilationist: The commonalities between African Americans and the rest of American society. Individuals who share this philosophy often focus on entering the mainstream in order to work within the system to create change.
- Humanist: The similarities that African American share with all humans. This viewpoint causes one to define self less in terms of race and place greater focus on individuality. (Shelton & Sellers, 2000)

The four racial ideology subscales involve individuals' beliefs and attitudes related to the following areas: 1) perceptions of the dominant group, 2) intergroup relations, 3) political/economic development, and 4) cultural/social activities (Sellers et al., 1998). Previous racial identity models outlining the variability of black identity have suggested an optimal ideology in regard to the emphasis one places on race, suggesting either a de-emphasis or significance of race in a healthy identity development (Penn, Gaines, & Phillips, 1993; Sellers, 1993; Sellers et al., 1998). However just as in the variability of the conceptual development of racial identity, the authors of the MMRI believe there is no optimal ideology due to differences of beliefs, behaviors, and environments which influence individuals' lives.

Racial regard is the final dimension of the MMRI and consists of the affective and evaluative judgments individuals place on their race and is the dimension often linked to self-esteem (Rowley et al., 1998). The dimension is made of a private and

public component. Private regard is known as the positive or negative feelings individuals associate with their membership as part of the black race. Public regard relates to the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively, and can be viewed as an assessment of how African Americans are valued by the broader society (Sellers et al., 1998). Authors of the MMRI recognize previous research which shows a variance of philosophies regarding the relationship between the two concepts. The mainstream approach of racial identity suggests that a public regard which recognizes the ways in which society devalues one's group results in increasingly negative private regard. However, the underground approach of racial identity distinguishes that awareness of racism restricts the internalization of negative stigmas and therefore allows one to maintain a positive private regard (Sellers et al., 1998).

The MMRI is normally operationalized using the multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI). The MIBI was developed by Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith (1997) to explore racial identity among African Americans. The inventory consists of 56 Likert scale items which require students to choose an answer ranging between "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The inventory only measures centrality, regard, and ideology, as racial salience is considered to explore the situational component of racial identity in response to cues in the environment at particular points in time. While the inventory does allow for individuals to evaluate their perceptions about race and its value in their lives, the MIBI is still operating under the white frame of research which seeks to quantify race into predetermined categories. The survey does

not allow for meaning to be captured behind survey response which better addresses complexity of racial identification, an understanding that guided the current study to center the MMRI on qualitative methodology.

It is suggested by the MMRI authors that racial salience be measured through experimental and quasi-experimental methods in order to study the social context of situational behavior, making a multimethod approach to the MMRI framework possible (Sellers et al., 1998). For example, Shelton and Sellers (2000) conducted a study in which participants were placed either in a racially salient or racially ambiguous situation. In the salient condition, a black female was placed in a room with three white females during which time a video was showed of a white man attacking a black man. In the ambiguous situation, a black female was put in a room with either three black females or three white males to watch a video of a white man attacking another white male. Because there was nothing that made the situation inherently racially salient in the latter condition, one's race was not necessarily brought to the forefront of the situation through which everything must be interpreted. Although this type of experiment places emphasis on the situational context of racial salience related to African American racial identity, exploration within participants' everyday interactions is more in line with the purpose of naturalistic inquiry and was incorporated in the current study.

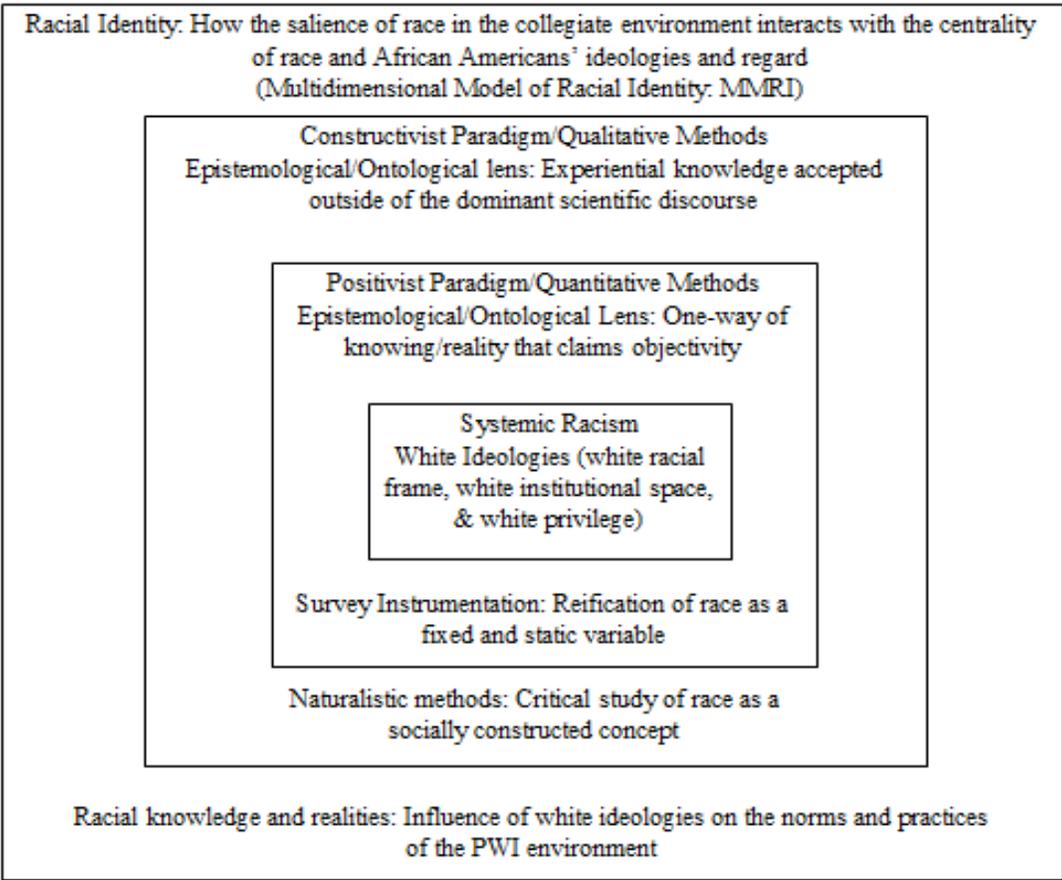
Interaction of the four dimensions of the MMRI forms a multidimensional approach to studying racial identity. Literature on racial identity acknowledges that stable beliefs and attitudes influence behavior during specific events, and these attitudes come to the forefront particularly in racially salient rather than racially ambiguous

situations (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). The process of racial identity conceptualized by the MMRI consists of the interaction of racial centrality and situational cues, which determine the extent to which one feels race is salient during a specific event. Salience interacts with stable beliefs about race to determine how one interprets the event and decides to behave within the situation (Sellers et al., 1998). This model can be the key to understanding how one African American student can feel stigmatized and alienated in a predominantly white setting, while another African American student can function with feelings of acceptance and belonging. The MMRI involves interplay of stable attitudes about being African American combined with situational components of how important race becomes in specific situations (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). The use of this model as a theoretical framework will create meaningful insight regarding the numerous factors that affect students' racial identity.

## **Conclusion**

Figure 2 outlines the conceptual framework of this study. The historical context of racism in America has called for critique of the dominant quantitative methodology which has guided research and the need for increased research perspectives which accept experiential knowledge and multiple realities. A qualitative approach to multidimensional racial identity permitted that the racial realities of African American students within a PWI be realized. In studies of the black student experience at PWIs, two themes often emerge: the importance of establishing networks of support, and the energy that is either cultivated or diverted by the interactions that take place on campus (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). The concept of white institutional space includes the

history of the institution, norms and racialized practices of the institutional culture, and the dominant white discourse which creates racism against students of color (Moore, 2008). A comprehensive study of how the collegiate environment affects African American students must include the background of how education at predominantly white institutions is racialized.



**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

While exploring the racial identity of African American students, framing this research with a critical look at the institutional norms which work to reaffirm white privilege within the PWI environment was essential. This study utilized the MMRI as the theoretical framework and was grounded by a comprehensive review of literature concentrated on racial ideologies and various racial identity issues which affect one's self-concept and reference group orientation. Because qualitative methodology has never before been systematically applied to the MMRI, the current research transformed the theoretical perspective with naturalistic inquiry in order to study the influence of the PWI environment through multiple dimensions of racial identity. A new methodological approach allowed the research questions of the study to be answered: how the stable and situational components of racial identity interact, how the norms and traditions of the campus affect perceptions about race, and how students associate with various reference groups on campus to realize race in their experiences.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

In order to capture African American students' perceptions of race in the PWI environment, this study was framed through theoretical acknowledgement of multiple ways of knowing. Patton (2002) makes connections to the construction of knowledge and ontological reality, the idea that individuals' worldview is relative and based on their own construction of reality. Constructivism highlights the role of context in the creation of knowledge. Lincoln and Guba (2013) ground constructivism as a systematic way to answer the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological variance of scientific inquiry; they recognize that knowledge consists of individual sense-making as well as shared constructions as knowledge is merged toward consensus. This premise is essential in studying a social construction such as race, as this phenomenon has been framed by multiple realities. Rather than studying racial identity through quantitative generalizations, this study utilized a constructivist approach along with qualitative methodology which emphasizes the value of interpretation. The following chapter will outline how case study methodology and naturalistic inquiry guided this study.

#### **Case Study Methods**

The positivist paradigm that has traditionally dominated scientific inquiry emphasizes detachment from that being studied and calls for objectivity in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Naturalistic inquiry, on the other hand,

recognizes that researchers are influenced by their epistemological stance, the paradigms which form their research questions, and the context around what is being studied (Westbrook, 1994). Because qualitative research allows the researcher to acknowledge him or herself as the human instrument engaged in interaction with that which is being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the process of inquiry must be a reflexive process of interaction and interpretation of the experiences of others (Smith, 1983). The goals of naturalistic inquiry reflect the role of reflexivity and the important role that a researcher has in becoming the lens through which interpretations and understandings are made (Hays & Singh, 2012; Stewart, 2010).

Qualitative research allows for a thick description of that which is being explored (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the goal is to provide insight and deep understanding of a specific space and view of the world (Punch, 2005). The racial identity of African American students in this study was explored using case study methodology. A case study can be defined as a bounded system, meaning that a phenomenon is explored within certain boundaries of understanding. As Merriam (1988) explains:

A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. The bounded system, or case, might be collected because it is an instance of some concern, issue, or hypothesis. (p. 9-10)

A case study provides rich description of a particular phenomenon explored in a specific setting. Related to the case study is the concept of a working hypothesis, meaning that generalizations regarding a specific context are not conclusions but rather emerging

discoveries of the particular conditions observed in a particular setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An instrumental case study approach was utilized, meaning that a particular site or context is explored while the focal point is a more comprehensive and multifaceted issue (Stake, 1995). The PWI chosen for this study was employed as a single site in order to explore the dimensions of racial identity deeply through a qualitative lens.

Case study methodology does not follow one particular scheme for data collection or analysis; based on the underlying questions being explored, case study methodology can employ a variety of methods (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). However, case study methodology has been significantly linked to qualitative methods, as the interpretation of context calls for the comprehensive description of a unique social situation. Stake links qualitative methods to the interpretive nature of the case study in stating, “Quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as ‘error’ outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding” (1995, p. 39). Because a qualitative case study focuses on intensive and holistic description, its characteristics can be defined as particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive (Merriam, 1988). In order to illuminate understandings of a phenomenon based on emerging data within the context being studied, the focus is on the process of understanding rather than testing of variables.

### **Role of the Researcher and Positionality**

Qualitative methodology centers inquiry on the role of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Stewart, 2010). Acknowledgment of the researcher as the

human instrument in scientific inquiry has several implications. The scientific community comes together to determine the standards of inquiry, and the dominant stance in scientific research has focused on objectivity. Historically, researchers have claimed to be operating under the concept of objectivity for two reasons: 1) to avoid claims of bias in their research, and 2) to be able to report generalizability of findings so those exact findings can be applied across situations regardless of contexts (Goar, 2008; Hays & Singh, 2012). However, research under the premise of objectivity has not necessarily meant that inquiry was free from bias. Researchers who have been intentional in critiquing the veil of objectivity in science by acknowledging the cultural and political influences of knowledge production have often found themselves in a battle for legitimization and acceptance in the dominant scientific discourse (Goonatilake, 1993).

Scholars who acknowledged racism were often shunned from the scientific community and labeled as “unscientific” for not following the norms of objectivity, as emphasized by Stepan and Gilman:

By the norms of modern science, passion was taken to be an inappropriate stance in relation to nature and scientific argument. Science called for detachment, neutrality, a depoliticization of the terms of the debate, and the achievement of the suitably scholarly tone (1993, p. 187).

As a researcher, I choose to engage in inquiry which challenges the dominant discourse of objectivity and acknowledges the social construction of race in the experiences of students of color. Based on knowledge acquired in my doctoral program, particularly

through sociology courses on race and social science methods, I seek intentionality in my research in order to create discourse that challenges the dominant frame of research as well as the white ideologies which shape institutions of higher education.

The false assertion of objectivity in research allows individuals to reject the importance of race in understanding reality and to also silence people of color and experiences which exist outside of the norms of white ideology (Stepan & Gilman, 1993). Race-critical theories such as critical race theory, which I outlined in the previous chapter, challenge institutional policies and highlight the importance of experiential knowledge in allowing individuals to name their own reality (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although storytelling in research is highly disregarded in the dominant discourse on legitimate scientific knowledge, experiential knowledge stands as a powerful tool in deconstructing oppressive structures by giving deeper meaning to multiple realities (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As the researcher, I sought to provide an outlet for students to name their own reality within institutional spaces in which white norms are affirmed and to create power behind that process.

As a researcher deeply interested in understanding the “why” behind the ways in which students of color perceive their educational environment, I feel that case study methodology provides the mechanisms needed to explore a context in detail. While those engaged in qualitative research see reflexivity as a strength in research, it is also seen as a major flaw to many in the quantitative realm, or more specifically, individuals who call for complete objectivity and detachment from that which they study. As a researcher, I accept the importance of my role as the researcher and the possible effects

of acting as the human instrument. Qualitative inquiry is often given a negative connotation in its association with subjectivity; it is implied that personal contact with that being studied will produce bias and bring into question one's credibility. Patton (2002) uses the term empathic neutrality to describe the midpoint between becoming too involved and being too distant to that being studied.

Burawoy (1998, p.6) refers to a "level of explicit consciousness" in case methodology, meaning that the scientist is able to acknowledge being socially situated within research and understand the effects that interaction has on knowledge production. I understand the importance of creating dialogue which counters colorblind rhetoric and allows individuals to cause ruptures in dominant structures by naming their own reality. It is my hope that by taking the study of racial identity out of the dominant frame of research, my process and findings will encourage other doctoral students often persuaded to value generalizations over in-depth contextual data to do the same.

## **Data Sources**

### **Site**

Unity University is a research intensive institution located in the southern region of the country, which is of particular importance to the barriers of inclusion which still affect many PWIs today. This PWI was chosen as a single site case study in order to study race within a bounded system and examination of a social group (Merriam, 1988), due to its highly homogeneous student body and conservative reputation. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, specific details regarding the university's racial demographics are not outlined in this report. However, the percentage of African

American students is represented in single digits; this factor of low African American enrollment made it all the more critical to protect the anonymity of participants. To contextualize the campus culture, student activities at Unity are closely tied to campus traditions, with student involvement being essential to the majority of the student population. In addition to general student programs, there is also a multicultural center which houses ethnic and racially-based student programs. Black organizational membership reflects the common practice that the majority of African American students fulfill involvement through multicultural programs or historically black fraternities and sororities.

### **Sampling**

This study relied on purposive sampling, which is sampling that establishes criteria for inclusion based on a determination that rich information will be provided on the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). Because qualitative research focuses on exploring relationships rather than making generalizations through representativeness such as in quantitative studies (Punch, 2005), a nonprobability sampling such as purposive sampling is ideal for case study methodology. As Merriam (1988) explains, “Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (p. 48). The sample consisted of African American undergraduate students in their junior or senior year. The rationale for the exclusion of freshmen and sophomores was to focus on the accumulated experiences and perceptions that students constructed while in college, rather than the initial reactions to college experienced during the first or

second year. A sample involving freshmen could have possibly explored their adjustment to a new environment.

Students of the study also had to self-identify in at least one racial category as African American. While this criteria created an exclusion of individuals in the student population often associated with black identity (for example, African students), the MMRI is based specifically on the racial identity of African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998). The focus of this requirement in the sample was not on racial categorization; however, because the MMRI includes the unique characteristics of the African American experience in America, it was important that participants relate to this categorization within their racial identity.

A total of six students were included in the sample. The small sample size was intentional in that naturalistic inquiry is focused on in-depth study of a particular context rather than generalizations to be made from a larger population (Punch, 2005). Because qualitative methods focus on in-depth study and contextual transferability rather than generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the small sample size was also intended to maximize experiential knowledge and explore variance in the black student community through in-depth dialogue of each student's reality. Because purposive sampling accounts for local conditions and mutual shapings within a specific context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), discourse reflected the way in which race was treated as a taboo subject in this particular campus community. A small sample allowed for in-depth engagement and discussions regarding the personal experiences of those students who choose to do so. As outlined in my data collection section below, the multiple interviews,

observations, and periods of engagement intended for each participant created a comprehensive understanding of each participant's racial identity within the various dimensions outlined by the MMRI.

Three of the students were recruited for their involvement in racially-based student organization (i.e., African American sororities and fraternities or black student alliance associations), while three were recruited for involvement in mainstream or traditional organizations (i.e., student government or campus orientation organizations) (see Table 1). The rationale for differentiating participation in these student groups was to understand the ways in which individuals made connections and interpreted situational cues based on experiences in those groups. Equally important was the way in which student organizations were defined in the campus culture. Certain groups were significantly valued and tied directly to university traditions, which allowed for a deeper understanding of how white institutional norms were affirmed by institutional practices. Prospective participants were nominated by student affairs professionals who held advisory roles for various student organizations. The nomination process itself shed valuable light on the culture of black student participation in mainstream organizations. Several advisors expressed interest in the findings, as they felt the study would provide valuable knowledge on the challenges they faced in encouraging greater African American student engagement in those groups.

**Table 1. Participant Student Organization Involvement**

Participant	Classification	Upbringing	Organizational Affiliation
Dennis	Junior	Military family; homeschooled until high school; predominantly white high school	African American Southern Student Conference (R), Males of Excellence (R), Bonder Male Society (T/M), Christian Freshman Leaders (T/M), ROTC (T/M), Traditions Holder (T/M)
Angela	Junior	Diverse neighborhood and high school	Coalition of black Students (R), Scholars (R)
Bruce	Junior	Predominantly black neighborhood and high school	African American Southern Student Conference (R), black Student Alumni (R), Cultural Awareness and Development (R), National Pan Hellenic Council fraternity (R), Bonder Representative Council (T/M)
Greg	Junior	Military family; diverse military town and high school	African American Southern Student Conference (R), Bonder Class (T/M), Performance Hall (T/M)
Ron	Junior	Military family; predominantly white neighborhood and high school	Males of Excellence (R), Bonder Classes (T/M), Freshman Bonders (T/M), Rookie Experience (T/M), Sophomore Leaders (T/M), Student Radio (T/M), Student Government (T/M)
Amira	Senior	Military family; predominantly white high school	Bonder Representative Council (T/M), Global Initiatives Society (T/M), National Pan Hellenic Council sorority (R), ROTC (T/M), ROTC Honors Society (T/M)

**Note: R = Racially-based Organization (based on commonalities of race or cultural experiences); T/M = Traditional/Mainstream Organization (based on dominant traditions of the institution or white culture); All participants and organizations were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Organizations encompass involvement since freshman year.**

Reference group theory, the extent to which one relates to a particular group (Cross, 1991), was included in the review of literature to explicate the role of group membership on student identity. The college itself is considered a reference group, in that based on enrollment, each student was in a sense part of the community and the traditions associated with that institution. Bonders was the term utilized in the study to describe all individuals within the study body at Unity University. Using the context of institutions in the Midwest such as the Indiana Hoosiers and Wisconsin Badgers, the term Unity Bonders was designed to reflect the strong university bond and sense of pride held by students within the community. Beyond surface level unity, however, when students do not connect with the dominant culture of their campus they may compensate by joining subcultures. These subcultures include ethnic or culturally-based organizations which allow students to connect with others of similar beliefs, religions, majors, or racial backgrounds (Museus, 2008). By including the perspectives of African American Bonders who chose to make connections in racially-based as well as mainstream organizations, the intention was to explore the different ways in which race was experienced in both contexts.

### **Data Collection**

Generalization across contexts is not the goal of qualitative methodology, as qualitative research is instead aimed at particularization. Particularization entails a thorough understanding of a particular context so that data may be used as a working hypothesis in the study of similar contexts (Patton, 1980). Various qualitative methods were utilized to form a working hypothesis of African American students' perceptions of

the racialized PWI environment. The use of multiple methods of data collection creates triangulation to validate discoveries in the study utilizing different forms of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is known as the process of combining multiple practices, methods, and perspectives in order to add rigor and complexity to a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This study incorporated multiple forms of data collection in order to increase trustworthiness. Trustworthiness exemplifies the concept of research quality in that a researcher uses certain criteria to build confidence in the “truth” of one’s findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goals of qualitative research in relation to trustworthiness are referred to as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and were all incorporated in the current study.

Credibility refers to the believability of a study, or whether or not the explanation of a study fits the description and interpretation fits the context (Janesick, 2000). The establishment of credibility includes activities to increase the probability of credible findings, refining working hypotheses as additional information is gathered, and checking findings and interpretations with participants and sources of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability, also referred to as naturalistic generalizability, has to do with the extent of the description provided in the research process including participants, settings, and time frame of a study. The goal of transferability in qualitative research is to create working hypotheses under which thick description allows others to make decisions about the degree to which findings may be possibly transferred or applicable to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability deals with the consistency of a study by taking a closer look at the strategies that create stability of an inquiry over time

(Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The purpose is to examine the process used in order to establish authenticity and fairness, and this process usually involves activities likened to auditing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the use of audit trail materials and documentation of researcher reflexivity, confirmability allows better assertion that findings are grounded in the data, and that systematic interpretations have been made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The goals of qualitative research reflect the role of reflexivity in inquiry and the important role that a researcher accepts in becoming the lens through which interpretations and understandings are made. Reflexivity is an essential aspect of qualitative methodology as a complex and interactive process:

Investigators seek ways of demonstrating to their audience their historical and geographical situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work, their surprises and ‘undoings’ in the process of the research...and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027)

As the researcher, data collection for this study was done with an ongoing recognition of the social, cultural, and ideological perspectives of myself and participants in capturing their authentic voices.

In order to create trustworthiness, I incorporated data collection methods such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checking, audit trail, and documentation through a reflexive journal. My engagement with participants on campus occurred over the course of three academic semesters, and every effort was

made to observe students in various settings within the campus environment to confirm and make meaning of our interview discourse. Peer debriefing involves a researcher consulting with a peer about inquiry, allowing opportunities to explore and refine any working hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My dissertation committee members offered guidance throughout the process of inquiry as well as my cohort of doctoral classmates in sessions during which we provided insight into our processes of reflection and analysis. Member checking involves ways in which data is checked with the groups from which data is collected in order to ensure that an adequate representation of their realities is generated (Punch, 2005). I remained in contact with participants for clarification of interviews notes and methodological questions addressed in my own reflexive journal or immediately following observations. By providing participants with transcripts and drafts of findings as themes emerged, I intended to include students in feedback from data collection through the formatting of the case study report.

I also created an audit trail, which includes various field notes, initial findings, recordings, and other materials (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each interview was audio recorded and numerous research memos following each of the four rounds of interviews allowed for additional reflectivity. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout my study to keep track of my interactions and interpretations during data collection and analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mention the significance of the reflexive journal, through which a researcher can provide valuable information about methodological decisions which are made and one's own values and reactions to data that influence such

decisions. The comprehensive nature of my research materials allowed assurance of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the case study.

### **Interviews**

The art of interviewing is viewed as an interactive process between two individuals as they negotiate meanings of certain contexts (Patton, 2002). Interviews vary in their degree of structure, overtness, and the relationship between the researcher and the respondent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose lies in finding out that which cannot readily be observed, as “we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world” (Patton, 1980, p. 196). In order to capture an in-depth understanding of racial identity, I incorporated semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to use a basic set of questions to be explored but allow for flexibility in the conversation to lead to new topics of discussion (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The flexibility of the interview was essential to the purpose of this study. While the protocol was established by directly taking survey construct items of the multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI) as interview questions, the survey in and of itself does not allow for any contextual evidence to be provided of the specific influence of the immediate environment. Therefore additional questions about the campus environment were added to the interview protocol, and the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for further probing as additional considerations emerged through the discourse (see Appendix A-D).

Participants were each interviewed four times throughout the course of the study in order to gain understanding of the four dimensions of the MMRI and their involvement in campus life. At the onset of the study I discussed with each of them the purpose of deconstructing the MIBI survey items throughout our discourse. Rather than responding on a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree, they transformed the study of racial identity by giving qualitative meaning as to why or why not they would associate their racial beliefs with the corresponding item. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) emphasize the importance of context in identity development in order to challenge myths of campus neutrality in higher education. The sample items of the MIBI illustrate the complexity of racial identity for African Americans. But by taking them out of the dominant frame of research and utilizing the constructs as open-ended interview questions, I allowed participants to describe their beliefs and values in their own voice reflective of how their racial identity was revealed in their various social settings.

### **Observations**

In order to explore the situational dimension of racial salience, participants were observed in their natural settings. Their various campus spaces included organizational meetings, campus events, and social settings in which they interacted with others. The researcher in qualitative studies ranges in his or her observation role on the spectrum of complete participant, observer as participant, to complete observer (Hays & Singh, 2012). In case study research, the ideal stance is what is known as researcher participant, meaning that the researcher participates in social situations but is only partially involved in order to maintain his or her researcher position (Merriam, 1988).

My role in the PWI observations was that of researcher participant. I sat in on students' organizational meetings and attended events to observe how they interacted with others in those settings. Some instances required me to interact with individuals, such as during a campus event when students began a tradition chant and I joined in as not to further call attention to myself as an outsider. Or during some organizational meetings in certain settings, mainly the racially-based organizations participants held leadership positions in, students would introduce me to the staff members to inform them of the purpose of my presence. I used researcher discretion in determining the extent of my role as observer in the effort to affect the immediate situation as minimally as possible.

Observer effect is known as the change in behavior of participants due to the presence of the researcher (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2003). Due to the sensitive nature of African American identity within a PWI campus community, I strived to ensure that my observations did not interfere with the relationships established by my participants. My observations took into consideration the dimensions of the social setting: space, actors, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, and feeling (Spradley, 1980). Due to the interaction of these dimensions in the PWI environment, my observations were conducted in ways that were as nonintrusive as possible. For example, I deemed certain student organizational meetings highly racially salient for my participants, particularly in mainstream organizations in which students were often the only black member. On those occasions I avoided note taking so that the situation would not be altered with increased notice of my presence or my participant would not be made uncomfortable.

The goal of the observations within this study, just as in the experiment conducted by Shelton and Sellers (2000) to capture the dimension of racial salience, was to understand how students respond to situational cues in either racially salient or racially ambiguous situations. Racial identity acknowledges that stable beliefs and attitudes influence behavior during specific events, and these attitudes come to the forefront particularly in racially salient rather than racially ambiguous situations. Salience interacts with stable beliefs about race to determine how one interprets the event and decides to behave within the situation (Sellers et al., 1998). It is through these observations with students that I captured how racial salience was manifested in the PWI environment.

### **Participant Reflections**

Throughout the course of the study, participants kept a reflection journal which was designed to allow them to record their feelings regarding their experiences in the campus environment. These reflections provided greater insight into issues brought up during interviews, and participants utilized the reflection journals between interviews which in turn provided additional attention to issues to be discussed at subsequent interviews. The use of diaries or reflective writings in data collection allows for greater understanding of participants' lived experiences as well as revelation of topics that participants might not feel comfortable sharing during interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). In order to use this method as a source of data collection, I explained the purpose of the journals at the first interview related to the overall goal of the study. I deemed it important to leave the structure (length and duration of writing) fairly open with the

intent that participants would not view the method as an inconvenience. The journal was intended to provide students with the opportunity to share insights on their personal realities with race in their everyday interactions on campus.

At the onset of subsequent interviews with each participant, I collected the reflection journals to make a researcher copy to inform me of incidents which coincided with our interview discourse and for additional reflexivity on my part during the process of data collection. This procedure allowed me to have access to the journal data while allowing the maximum time for students to retain their work in order to be constantly engaged in the study along with interviews and observations. Students wrote about a variety of topics which led me to better understand their backgrounds as well as the campus incidents that challenged them to a greater awareness of race. Reflexive journal entries were utilized through the process of data analysis to confirm findings and to further define emerging themes.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an ongoing, open-ended process which can extend indefinitely and which forces the researcher to make decisions regarding narrowing of the study and interpretation of data (Merriam, 1988). Analysis of this case study took place as a holistic and context sensitive process (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline the guidelines for determining when the data collection phase is complete: exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities, and overextension. Analyses incorporated interviews, observation field notes, participant reflection journal entries, and content from research memos and the researcher's reflexive journal.

Interviews were transcribed by hand to ensure for continual engagement with the data, and each transcript was unitized for content analysis. Content analysis is a technique used to reduce descriptive words into categories with shared meanings; it is a continuous process throughout data collection during which the working hypotheses are developed naturally from the data that emerges (Westbrook, 1994). The process of content analysis consists of sense-making of data and reduction of the material accumulated in order to determine core consistencies (Patton, 2002). During initial analysis, the researcher creates units of data which can be used in coding to identify major categories of discovery (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data was organized into a manageable system of analysis through use of the constant comparative method, a technique which entails an interactive process of creating and restructuring categories until emergent themes have been saturated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (2002) describes the importance of convergence and divergence in the process of coding, both processes which were used in my data analysis. In order to create categories for convergence, I looked for internal homogeneity as well as external heterogeneity within the emerging patterns. This involved determination that individual categories were internally consistent in describing a pattern of regularity as well a comparison between categories to ensure that a comprehensive picture of multidimensional racial identity was produced. Divergence involves the process of fleshing out categories in order to confirm that categories have been saturated and new sources of information are deemed as redundant (Patton, 2002).

Content analysis was completed keeping in mind the purpose of the study: to explore situational and stable components of African American identity by utilizing the MIBI's constructs combined with observation data of the black student PWI experience. For the process of content analysis each dimension of the MMRI was first analyzed independently in order to provide an in-depth description of the influences and development of each dimension. Themes which emerged from the interview data were converged to detail racial centrality, racial ideology, and racial regard separately and extensively. The dimension of racial salience was initially analyzed separately as well to make meaning of the situational component of racial identity based on observation data. After themes for each dimension were saturated, themes were then compared across dimensions incorporating all data to comprehensively describe the interaction between dimensions in the PWI environment. Because qualitative data analysis does not have any specific formula or technical format, the data was analyzed and coded in the context of the purpose of this study to ensure an inclusive picture of multidimensional racial identity. Findings are situated in the intent to deconstruct the MMRI items through qualitative inquiry, the process of which new understandings were developed to inform future use of the model.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. The methodological decision to set the boundary of the case within the PWI context excluded the ability to be able to study multidimensional identity across institutional types. However, this methodological decision was intended for in-depth depiction of the influence of the PWI context,

particularly in relation to the situational component of the MMRI. This delineation is not viewed as a limitation in the context of this study because the boundary was intended to provide rich description of the challenges to diversity that this institution faced, specifically with African American inclusion still represented by single digit percentages at this university.

An additional limitation included the shift from quantitative methodology that did not allow for direct correlation with previous studies that utilized the MMRI as operationalized with the MIBI. Previous MMRI studies have revealed statistical relationships between subscales, such as a positive correlation between centrality, private regard, and the nationalist ideology subscale (Sellers et al., 1998). While this study did not produce numerical correlation, the in-depth qualitative approach provided qualitative correlations between the MMRI constructs. Generalization and statistical analysis that are customarily connected to the use of the MMRI were not the purposes of the study. Yet the shift to a constructivist approach allowed additional data to give meaning to the MMRI constructs that has not been previously captured. Participants engaged in discourse that permitted relationships to be made while affording contextual data of the influence of the collegiate environment.

## **Conclusion**

Lincoln and Guba reiterate that the case study “provides the thick description needed to apprehend, appreciate, and understand the circumstances of the setting, most importantly, its physical, social, economic, and cultural elements” (2013, p. 80). Case study methodology allowed for deep description of six African American students within

the context of Unity University, a predominantly white institution in which my participants realized their beliefs about race through their involvements. Over the course of twenty-four interviews, numerous observations, and reflections from the students as well as myself as the researcher, I was able to capture understanding of how those six students interacted with others within the context of institutional norms which influenced their identity development. The collection of qualitative data requires that the researcher get close enough to the people situated in the context, provide pure descriptions of the setting, and include direct quotations from the people being studied (Patton, 2002). Findings from this study captured the students' voices in their own realities.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

With the MMRI as the theoretical framework of the study, data collection focused on a full description of racial identity issues for African American students within a predominantly white space. The research questions which directed the study were addressed throughout data collection in order to understand each question of interest. The following questions guided the research process: 1) What effect do the institutional norms and practices of a predominantly white institution have on the perceptions of African American students' views toward their race? 2) How do African American students at a predominantly white institution identify with various reference groups on campus in order to better understand the role of race in their lives? 3) How do the situational cues in the campus environment of a predominantly white institution interact with stable components of African American racial identity? This current chapter outlines findings which captured the answer to each research question and deconstructed the dimensions of the MMRI to create an in-depth understanding of multidimensional racial identity.

The research questions of the study were thoroughly threaded through all dimensions because of the synthesis of environmental interactions, but I will note the prevalence of certain elements in the dimensions. Research question one, which deals with the norms of a PWI on students' cognizance of race, was mostly addressed by the

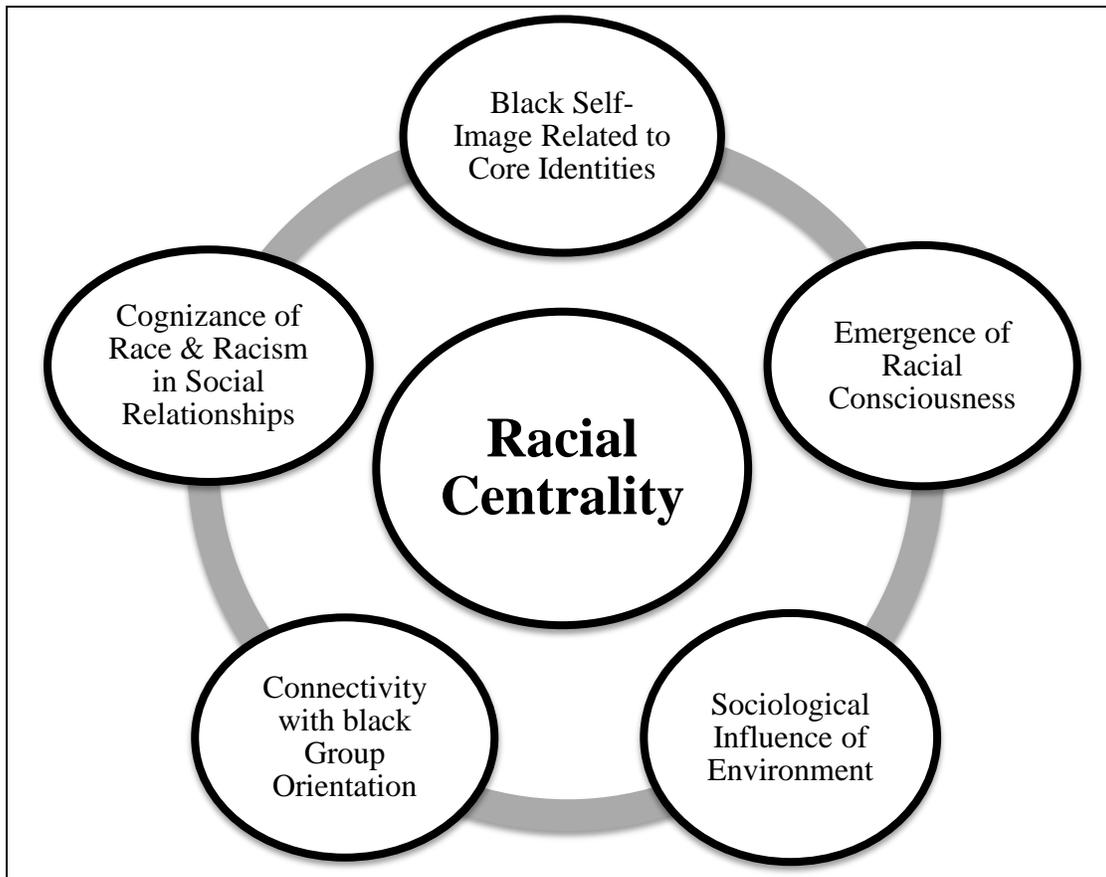
first dimension of racial centrality as participants portrayed the importance of race to their core identity. The second dimension, racial ideology, also shed light on the reciprocal influence of institutional norms on students' personal beliefs about race. Question one was also highly prevalent within the third dimension of racial regard as students described how public attitudes about the socially constructed black race influenced their private beliefs on holding membership in the group. Research question two, insight into students' interactions with various reference groups on campus, was realized through the second dimension of racial ideology which outlines students' attitudes with regards to how they should interact with others in their immediate environments. This inquiry was also dominant through the final dimension of racial salience within observations of participants in mainstream as well as racially-based organizations.

Research question three, the interaction of situational and stable components of racial identity, addresses a comprehensive overview of how the dimensions influenced and interacted with each other. The final dimension of racial salience outlined the situational component related to other dimensions, but question three was also threaded within each dimension as connections were made between the four dimensions. Just as theorized through the racial identity model, each separate dimension in and of itself is informative, but the interaction of all dimensions as a whole allows the MMRI to be utilized as a diagnostic understanding of the phenomenon of race manifested through the African American student experience. While findings in this chapter are organized into

sections according to each MMRI dimension, descriptions signify a synthesis of interactions within the PWI environment.

### **Racial Centrality**

Racial centrality is considered to be one of the stable dimensions of the MMRI; however, it is closely connected to the situational component of racial salience (Sellers et al., 1998). Centrality was the focus of the initial round of in-depth interviews in order to develop a frame of participants' core identities which also gave insight into the sociological influence of the PWI environment. Discourse entailed the MIBI constructs for racial centrality along with additional inquiry which allowed for further probing regarding their backgrounds and transition into the collegiate environment. The following themes which influence racial centrality emerged: black self-image related to core identities, emergence of racial consciousness, sociological influence of environment, connectivity with black group orientation, and cognizance of race and racism in social relationships (see Figure 3.)



**Figure 3. Racial Centrality in the PWI Environment**

### **Black Self-Image Related to Core Identities**

As Lincoln and Denzin (2005) attest, “Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of- and between- the observer and the observed” (p. 19). In order to get a better sense of the hierarchical identities which shape their worldview, participant were asked to articulate their top five descriptors in order of importance (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Participant Self-Identified Descriptors**

Participant	Descriptors
Dennis	black, ROTC, Christian, family-oriented, social
Angela	African American, woman, activist, Bonder, southerner
Bruce	African American, male, leader, Mama's boy, role model
Greg	Christian, African American, male, Bonder, Eagle Scout (good person)
Ron	Christian, African American, leader, family-oriented, friend
Amira	Christian, woman, culturally adaptable, black, Bonder

Participants used descriptors that reflect both their personal identity (PI) and some form of reference group orientation (RGO), whether it be through gender, religion, race, or collegiate affiliation. The concept of black identity was present for all individuals among their five top descriptors, even though the positioning of that descriptor varied for each individual. The MMRI denotes that race is central to each person depending on its hierarchical relationship with other personal identities within one's core identity. Some scholars might argue that the focus of the MMRI in studying the unique sociohistorical realities of African Americans might be problematic and more aligned with an additive approach to identity, through which identities are ranked and seen either as independent or in possible conflict (Bowleg, 2008; Stewart, 2010). However, participants described their various personal identities as mutually influential and intersecting, aligning with previous research studies on the intersectionality of multiple identities (Jones & McEwan, 2000; Stewart, 2009; Stewart, 2010). Although this aspect of identity is not an explicitly stated focus of the MMRI, a constructivist approach with the researcher as the instrument allowed me to incorporate an

understanding of identity intersectionality through further probing and analysis of participants' experiences. Through the use of an alternate epistemological lens and qualitative methods, the current study is situated as a significant contribution to the MMRI.

Initial construct items such as “Overall, being black has very little to do with how I feel about myself” and “In general, being black is an important part of my self-image” encouraged participants to express an interconnectedness of identities which reflected previous studies of multidimensionality. As minoritized individuals in various spaces, they were empowered through multidimensionality to not only overcome the negative black image but to also see themselves as multifaceted black individuals. Although the MMRI approaches identity as hierarchical to better understand differences in racial centrality for each individual, my participants through their discourse conversely relayed the interconnectedness of their identities as in concert and mutually influential. For example, Dennis as a devout Christian was able to connect with white peers through a common ground of conservative and family-oriented values. Later he would describe how his strong religious beliefs did not allow him to lend support to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, but those same beliefs guided him to respect all students. Black group membership was never expressed as in conflict with other personal identities but rather as a regulating factor that allowed them to move beyond a socially fabricated and overly adverse black image.

Regardless of the arrangement of their personal identities, race appeared as significant for students particularly because of the PWI context. Being black seemed to

be the regulating lens through which all other identities were filtered, as participants were constantly aware of the judgments placed on them and how race influenced their daily experiences. As minoritized individual existing in a predominantly white environment, students recognized that their black identity separated them from others, but they also chose to take on a sense of empowerment in seeing themselves through that lens. Greg explained the impact of black identity:

I feel like being an African American where I am in my life at Unity, it definitely lets me view myself differently, a sense of pride in what I've done. Everyone on this campus should be proud of themselves but me doing it as an African American definitely makes me feel better. Knowing that this world and the system wasn't necessarily made for me.

His statement is highly reflective of the participants' awareness of the effects of an institutional structure that was not created for their inclusion or support.

Emphasis on being in control of a personally affirmed black identity, rather than ascribed group identity placed on them by others, was of particular importance in the context of a PWI. In their immediate spaces, they countered the deleterious images placed on them by using the association of overcoming historical exclusions and barriers to take on a sense of pride in creating positive black images. As we discussed blackness as part of one's self-image and reflection, participants recognized race as a focal point. Dennis described race as "the motivation for a lot of things I do," and Greg defined being black as something that "keeps me conscious, humble and aware, and drives me."

Students all expressed a very distinct and personal connection to black identity within their core identities. This tie was not as evident as related to membership within a general black group, evident through discourse on construct items such as “I have a strong sense of belonging to black people.” The stronger connection students made to their personal black identity (PI) in comparison to black group affiliation (RGO) is of specific significance in the context of negative stigmas portrayed in the media which perpetuate blacks as inferior. Some spoke with a distinguishable ease in making meaning of their personal black identity versus the complexity of connectivity through a socially constructed black group image. This is evidence of the correlation of PI and RGO, in the sense that my participants recognized the interactions of the two factors of self-concept and outlined how group stigmas create a greater sense of self-awareness. As Amira stated, “Being black definitely changes other people’s perceptions which makes me reevaluate my perception of myself.” This cyclical interaction of personal identity and group orientation was explored throughout our reflective dialogues and would be significant in relation to racial regard.

### **Emergence of Racial Consciousness**

Students’ descriptions of their core identities as mutually influential represented their viewpoint within this particular moment in college but still very much reflected their prior experiences. The authors of the MMRI cite Markus and Kunda’s (1986) ideal of a working self-concept; they explain identity as malleable and recognize that variations of self-conceptions are unlikely to disappear but rather new self-conceptions are continuously added and activated based on ongoing events. In order to explore

students' prior conceptions of race that influenced their worldview and interacted with new experiences within the immediate PWI environment, we spent a significant amount of time discussing their upbringing. Students grew up in a wide range of communities, and although individuals from predominantly white areas might not have experienced firsthand racism, they grew up with the desire to excel and separate themselves from the negative stereotypes of the black image. Ron recalled feeling tension when he moved to a predominantly white community; he felt the need whenever interacting with an elderly white male to demonstrate as a young black male that he exhibited manners and excellence. Whether it involved being the only black student in advanced placement courses or participating in academic organizations that did not fit the "black" mold, these students encountered a cognizance of racial difference and judgments placed on them.

Parental influence in instilling centrality of race for individuals growing up in white spaces was significant in the forming of their identities. Greg declared that his mother constantly encouraged him to engross himself with black peers, and Amira reflected on constant parental encouragement to participate in black organizations. Amira recalled her father requiring her and her sisters to read black history books and complete a report on the contents; this ensured that they learned the historical facts that were not accounted for within the school curriculum. She expressed that his insistence had the opposite effect of pushing her away from trying to "be black." Amira and I shared this commonality of parental influence to counter the lack of cultural stimulus. We concluded that although these efforts are not necessarily appreciated by adolescents,

they are manifested later in life as black students are engrained with a deeper historical perspective and connectedness.

For students from predominantly black areas, they saw the negative stereotypes surrounding the black image played out in the incidents around them such as crime and the limited opportunities of their peers. These events influenced them to expand into new areas and activities, mainly cultivated in their decision to attend a PWI. While the concept of race or racism was not necessarily at the forefront of their high school experiences or upbringing, Angela and Bruce recalled a progression of events that created a greater awareness of racism. Growing up in a homogenous black environment, Bruce lacked awareness until a particular racial discrimination incident occurred in high school. Although he was already accepted to the university, his white counselor found an error in the grade point system and personally decided to get his acceptance letter pulled from the university's admission system. Fortunately the university gave him provisional acceptance through a summer academic preparation program. Bruce reiterated that he uses that story as a driving force to pursue excellence:

My mom tells me it's a very important story. Back then I really didn't think anything of it; now I realize that it could have been an explicit act of racism or stereotypical action. I remember her name- I told myself as soon as I get my graduation invitations I'm giving her one just to let her know.

While the MMRI rejects the notion of stage-like models that place individuals through a progression of attitudinal changes during their life span, all of the students in the study did refer to some incident or cultural awakening that brought race into the

forefront as their worldview lens. Cross' model of Nigrescence even under the revised model (1991) begins with the Pre-Encounter stage during which there is some change in racial distinction; in this sense the underground approach of the MMRI which acknowledges the commonality of African Americans in their unique sociohistorical identity was reflected through participants' discourse. Dennis spoke of being homeschooled and realizing his blackness once he entered public education in high school and his black peers mentioned that he did not fit the supposed norms of black behavior. Greg likewise explained that he was given his "black card" upon coming to Unity, as he was known as the "white black kid" growing up. Even though the racial demographics of the school mirrored his previous school settings, the racialized university culture suddenly deemed him the "black kid." These examples point to the relevance of race as students transferred and filtered various backgrounds through a new environment.

### **Sociological Influence of the Collegiate Environment**

The use of a constructivist approach to racial ideology allowed for students to describe their experiences leading to the decision to attend the university; this additional discourse permitted supplemental evidence regarding the influence of environment. Although the university holds a high reputation as a prestigious top school, as African American prospective students they were well aware of the lack of diversity which would impact their collegiate career. With hopes of being a lawyer, Angela's mentor suggested that she immerse herself among people with a variance of thought. Angela emphasized, "I wanted to be surrounded by people different from me so that I could

learn and grow because all I could do was scream at you. I couldn't actually make an argument." While the drastically small percentage of black students was well known to all of them, Greg and Ron mentioned that the strong sense of culture developed on the campus seemed to give them a sense of belonging. Ron, when contrasting his visit to other campuses stressed, "When my parents stopped to ask someone for directions, he was like welcome to Bonder land. To me that means something because it just meant the student body as a whole is behind you." The impact of a dominant institutional culture would have an effect on students' connectedness to black identity across racial dimensions.

As undergraduates having gone through adjustments to the collegiate environment, participants described how those experiential connections to the university deepened their connection to black identity. Angela articulated how the stark absence of black students negatively affected her and caused her to consider a transfer:

There was nothing but white people here. Even though in high school I was friends with white people I was constantly around black people. My AP classes had black people in them because it was like 90% black people. I went to Walmart and I saw black people, I went to the gym and saw black people- everywhere- I really didn't understand how important black people were in my life.

The main commonality that assisted all students in positive affinity with "I have a strong attachment to other black people" was through their involvement in student organizations. Angela vowed to try at least three student organizations before she left,

and a high school minority student mentorship program introduced her to a black student community that existed beyond her knowledge. At that point she fell in love with the university.

Because campus life was of the utmost importance as student leaders, participants described membership in various reference groups through their student organization involvement; they also delved into the complexity of involvement from the black student perspective. Among the black student community at Unity existed an either/or mentality, in that black students either chose to be involved in mainstream or racially-based organizations. Students in the study who held membership in both reference groups saw themselves as stepping outside of the scope of black student involvement, as the majority of black students choose to be affiliated with organizations based on a group's racial makeup rather than common social interests. This is a finding unlike other studies of black heterogeneity (Harper & Nichols, 2008) which explored involvement across institutional types. Given the context of a southern PWI and the tendency of racial separation, only a select group of black students ventured to participate in both organizational types.

Participants expressed their position in mainstream organizations often as the role of black representative, as they sometimes found the actions or interests of organizational members in conflict with an inclusion of diverse viewpoints. The possible presence of discrimination created barriers for black student involvement in mainstream organizations, but the perception of white students' refusal to embrace diversity compounded the issue. Greg gave insight into the process:

I'm not saying they [black students] don't feel welcome, but they feel that some people get the red carpet rolled out for them and others don't...they get involved elsewhere in the black community and they feel comfortable with that, so they stick with those organizations...sort of pigeonholed in the way they see things.

I probed further in regard to what white students thought to be the reason for a lack of black student involvement in mainstream organizations. While Greg previously heard his white counterparts say that the lack of black participants was due to the low percentage of black students, Greg expressed that in actuality they felt that black students just chose not to be involved. This was in direct contradiction to what Greg described, in that he often witnessed white student leaders failing to hand out event fliers to black students or express interest in recruiting more black members.

The inclination to attribute inequalities to anything but racism and to put the blame on black students in their desire to “self-segregate” corresponds to Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) findings on the central frames of colorblind racism. While participants did not allow organizational demographics to prevent them from involvement, a major concern was direct or indirect discouragement from the black student community that others might face concerning participation in traditional organizations, which is a finding consistent with previous research (Harper & Quaye, 2007). This additional barrier of black student involvement is essential in recognizing not only outgroup stigmas but ingroup influences as well.

## **Connectivity to Black Group Orientation**

White (1998) discusses the idea of community in reference to the behavioral norms and expectations that the members hold; in her particular study, the students “counted” in the black student community were determined by their background environments and worldviews. The black student community at Unity stood at as one of participants’ strongest reference group affiliations. When they spoke of a community of black students, they specifically focused their definition on active participation in African American centered events on campus and perceptions of connectedness. Amira explained this distinction among black students:

To be honest – the ones who are willing to hang out with other black people I feel strong attachment to... If you’re willing to be connected with me, I will be more than happy to be connected with you. I know that together we can do a lot of things, but if you are not willing to be connected with the black image in any way, shape, or form, then I really don’t want to have anything to do with you.

I initially hypothesized that due to the small percentage of African Americans at Unity, there would be a strong sense of connectivity in the black student community. However through our discourse, disconnect among black students became evident. Greg described connectivity as black students’ ability to recognize a shared minoritized status at Unity, but that connectivity often lacked a deeper meaning. This supports the earlier distinction between personal black identity and stigmatized black group orientation which challenges the legitimacy of defining centrality as a low or high statistical score.

Black connectivity while complex was articulated as an understanding that the black student community became more cohesive in response to an immediate stimulus in the larger campus context. Dennis felt a greater sense of connectivity due to the support he received during his campaign for Traditions Holder:

At Unity I feel like there is more of a connection because we make up such a small percentage here. It's like we all need to join together. And that goes back to the black community surrounding me in terms of voting, it's almost like all of these white people compressing on us...you just feel like this is a community.

Dennis' sense of obligation to represent the black community while in such a traditional role was not described as a manifestation of pressure as mentioned previously for possible reasons others might resist participation in mainstream organizations. Because participants saw themselves as actively engaged in the black community while holding traditional roles, none expressed connectivity in terms of a sense of pressure.

While the campus community served as the primary stage for identity reflection, the sociological influences of the larger black societal group were evident. Angela described how the concept of Ubuntu, an African term for humanity and connectedness, served as a guiding force in her life and allowed her ease in creating ties to the surrounding black community. Students further delineated the intricacy of black connectivity in that it carries negative connotations imposed by the dominant society. In response to "My destiny is tied to the destiny of other black people" Amira replied, "I don't even want to be tied to my generation right now. I try to separate myself from that, but at the same time how can I help an image if I'm so far away from the problem?"

Bruce also iterated the duality of creating group ties while clearly distinguishing his individuality in terms of excellence and leadership:

Wherever I'm meant to go I know it's going to be really really far and I'm gonna try to bring as many people along the way. But I'm also aware of those that want to come and those that don't want to come...that's probably where that 'oh he's too good for us' attitude comes from.

These reflections provide experiential evidence to support previous research concerning the interplay of individualism versus collectivism (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001). This concept will be further outlined in terms of participants' perceptions of racial regard.

### **Cognizance of Race and Racism in Social Relationships**

James (2008) describes race as a social phenomenon that is unique due to its combination of fictitious and factual attributes. Participants conveyed a conflict of personal standpoints in addressing the construct "Being black is not a major factor in my social relationships;" race for them was not always necessarily at the forefront but they recognized the social construction of race that for others was constant. Even Dennis who existed in a realm of comfort in that the majority of his friends were white recognized that there was a racial line not to be crossed; as he cautioned, "try to cross it and you'll see." He referred to his previous attempt to exist in a fog of ignorance regarding social relationships that were in actuality grounded in socially defined definitions of race. Angela as a biracial activist always saw race at the forefront of her identity, stating, "The stage I'm in I feel like the black and white part of me are in direct conflict...If I ever feel like something is in conflict of black people, I have to choose the

side of black people.” Herein lays insight into how identity is not only influenced by the societal predisposition to categorize but also how an individual is situated at a particular point in his or her immediate environment.

A sense of being torn between two worlds was articulated by many of my students, in terms of W.E.B. Dubois’ concept of double consciousness (1903/1997). Bruce expressed a sense of double consciousness he overcame in maintaining black friendships while creating new outlets of interaction with other cultures. He found comfort and motivation in the close bonds with members of his historically black fraternity: “Those guys are some of the most ambitious gentlemen I’ve ever met. Surrounding myself with them motivates me because when I’m going out and I’m in a white atmosphere...I’m being myself and I’m also being praised for it.” Participants spoke of maneuvering through the two social realms at Unity: being accepted by the black community while also functioning in white social realms. But the ways in which they spoke of making connections in the campus environment gave evidence of the mechanisms of resilience they utilized not just to survive in both realms, but to thrive in all of their endeavors.

The traditions and historical foundations of the institution were made apparent in every aspect of the university, from physical spaces to the general consensus of values upheld throughout the student body. Bonders existed in a space that emphasized that being a student at Unity trumped everything else. In theory, students were accepted as a family unit regardless of race, gender, or any other individual attribute. As Angela resonated, “You’re gonna say yes to me because I’m a Bonder and THEN I need to

prove myself.” This concept was very unique that students of color are socialized into the assumption of racism as a well-defined aspect of university culture. But participants also expressed a deep socialization as a Bonder, an ironic acceptance in their comprehension that under other circumstances they would be judged negatively as a black person. The title of Bonder created a unique paradox as such a significant part of their identity but yet only an illusion of social unity.

Power related to social imaging defined by society and media was very clear, apparent as Angela echoed, “Growing up we all thought that black was bad and ugly- this is what society will tell you.” All of the male participants had been assumed by whites to be athletes, and many attributed encountered stereotypes to the backgrounds of their white counterparts. Interestingly, many participants as far back as high school had been called white by outgroup as well as other blacks, because their actions and interests did not necessarily fit the mold of what is considered the norm of black identity. Whites prefaced the statement as a compliment; however, this form of racism illustrated the negative stereotypes associated with black as inferior, with whiteness being associated with superiority, intelligence, and as a standard for excellence. They referred to many Bonders as sheltered and close-minded; Dennis declared, “The scary thing is you have a lot of people at Unity that have not even interacted with black people, you have people from little podunk towns...their only perception of black people is what they see on TV.” The clarification of ignorance versus racism was expressed by participants, alluding to the overarching distinction between individual behaviors and systemic racism (Feagin, 2013). Students worked to avoid internalization of damaging stereotypes and

spoke of the need to portray themselves in ways that negated these images. As Greg expounded, “There’ve been situations where I’ve had to reevaluate what I would do, what I say just so I don’t portray the stereotype that I’m sure they have.”

The cyclical process of evaluating social stigmas through the lens of their own behaviors created a role of educator for participants. A huge part of my participants’ efforts were consumed in choices of when and when not to confront racism, a choice often fueled by the desire to avoid confrontation and being shunned in certain spaces. Particularly for students in traditional organizations, these choices were essential in their ability to function and carry out their organizational duties. Greg optimistically viewed his presence among white counterparts as a means to break negative stereotypes, also recognizing that this romanticized view of traditional organizational involvement was not necessarily present among the black community. Angela, as the president of a black organization with a clearly defined agenda, embraced confrontations with white counterparts as a means of relaying the constant discomfort black students experienced:

This guy on Facebook is like I don’t understand why black people feel they’re the only ones allowed to say the ‘n’ word... I’m not really about to explain your privilege. Angela as an activist is not the type of person to appease white people. I’ll be who I am and you can see me, but my goal is not to help ya’ll out. My goal is to help my people.

This interplay of racial centrality and interactions with the dominant group would show itself in the various ways participants chose to carry out their theoretical perspectives in the racial ideology dimension.

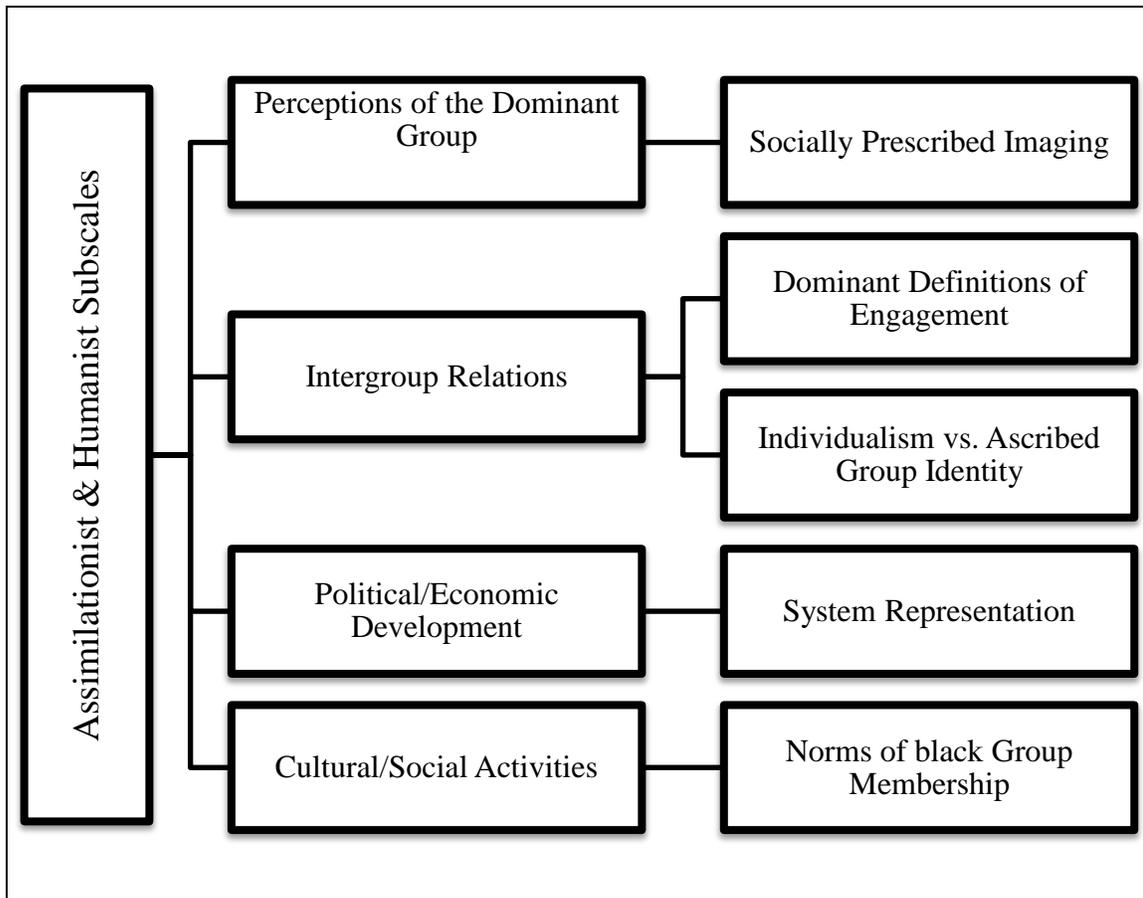
## **Racial Ideology**

As it relates to African Americans' beliefs regarding the ways in which they should interact with others in society, the racial ideology dimension gave deeper insight into how my participants chose to express their racial attitudes through involvement in their immediate environments. The MMRI outlines four subscales under the racial ideology dimension: assimilationist, humanist, nationalist, and oppressed minority. After completion of the MIBI, evaluation is made on which subscale an individual is more or less inclined to follow. Because qualitative methodology allowed for an in-depth dialogue of survey items, the intention of the analysis was not to reveal the inclination of each participant toward a particular ideology. However, discourse was meant to afford a better understanding of the social stimuli that would influence individuals to interpret constructs and behave in ways that corresponded with their racial beliefs. Because the MMRI makes no claims on which ideology subscale is optimal (Sellers et al., 1998), data from this study was therefore analyzed not to categorize participants along a continuum of ideological dispositions but rather coded openly to provide a more wide-ranging structure for understanding the influences of racial ideology.

### **Assimilationist and Humanist Subscales**

Manifestation of the four ideology subscales is described by the MMRI authors as representing the following theme areas: 1) perceptions of the dominant group, 2) intergroup relations, 3) political/economic development, and 4) cultural/social activities. In order to provide a thorough exploration of each set of constructs for the four ideology subscales, I divided the discourse on racial ideology between two interview sessions and

then centered data analysis on the four areas mentioned above. The assimilationist and humanist subscales have been found to be highly correlated (Sellers et al., 1998); because these two subscales focus on the perception of commonalities which African Americans feel with the dominant societal group, those corresponding construct items were explored during the second round of interviews. The following ideology themes for this subset emerged: socially prescribed imaging, dominant definitions of engagement, individualism versus ascribed group identity, system representation, and norms of black group membership (see Figure 4.)



**Figure 4. Assimilationist and Humanist Subscale Themes**

### **Perceptions of the Dominant Group: Imaging**

#### **Socially Prescribed Imaging**

Although they all expressed ability to thrive rather than survive in white spaces, participants specified the pervasiveness of racism which created race consciousness in their social relationships as outlined in the racial centrality discourse. In regard to the assimilationist construct “blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as white people who also espouse separatism,” there was a dissonance on whether or not racism had the same meaning for blacks and whites. Amira and Ron considered one or more of their

parents to be racist based on their upbringing in the segregated South. Amira described her father as being accepting of people of all colors, but intolerant when it came to social interactions such as her past dating experience with white classmates. They both defined the term racist as a prejudice of thought; however, Angela exemplified the opposing viewpoint which acknowledges power with prejudice:

I don't believe that black people can be racist. The statement always bothers me because it implies this simple idea of what racism is. It doesn't take into account the complexities of the power needed to be racist...if the word was prejudice in that sentence I would say yes you're correct. This would be us having the choice. But my grandparents didn't have a choice.

Greg further delineated the idea of power in the definition of racism by clarifying, "It's because they've [blacks] been shunned from whites. So we've seen trying to assimilate or trying to play nice has not worked so we stick to ourselves and make things work within our community." This description of a reactionary disposition due to exclusion from the mainstream ties directly with a push toward a more separationist approach.

As we progressed through the experiences that shaped their racial attitudes, my participants became more critical of the ways in which the negative black image was perpetuated through systems which affirmed whiteness. A significant portion of this reflection dealt with the media's portrayal of the black image. They delved into the complexity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century meaning of blackness based on the message created by mainstream values and perceptions of the dominant group. The greatest evidence of the negative black image was conveyed through the construct "A sign of progress is that

blacks are in the mainstream of America more than ever before.” Students recognized an abundance of black representation through TV, media, and the popularity of black rappers and athletes but also emphasized the negative connotations behind those depictions. Amira referred to social media sensations of blacks highlighted in the media in a very mocking way; she questioned the exploitation of low-income black “characters” which are currently so pervasive in the media.

Participants stressed the possible internalization of inferiority for many African Americans due to outgroup stereotypes affirmed by the media, particularly in the context of a predominantly white environment. Bruce reiterated, “It’s very unfortunate because a lot of times what we see on TV is what we believe, and it becomes a way of learning. We’re not cognizant of separating reality from all of this artificial stuff.” Students’ awareness of the ascribed images of blacks held by the dominant group served as a tool to combat negative stereotypes, a theoretical perspective also correlated with positive private regard (Sellers et al., 1998). Greg described his determination in moving beyond negative perceptions of the dominant group with the hopes that African Americans would be seen in a more positive light. Dennis discussed a lack of positive representation in the media which caused the dominant group to view successful black professionals as oddities. He described an annual Unity tradition in which Bonder alumni are honored and an African American lawyer and high-ranking army official was featured as the guest speaker. Dennis reflected on the complimentary nature in which the speaker was received by white students, almost as if that type of excellence displayed

by a black individual was unexpected. This example highlights the sociological influence of the environment and dominant white perspective on black racial ideology.

In contrast to his white classmates, Dennis described his racial cognizance of the negative stereotypes associated with the black image as an ever-present sixth sense. During a particular incident he was invited to a sorority party and upon walking in immediately noticed a Confederate flag on display. Instantly he recognized the discomfort he felt contrasted with the fact that most white students in the room either did not notice the racial symbol or deemed it as acceptable. This gives evidence of the racial salience of PWI spaces that for black students are constantly compared to dominant group perspectives. The males of the study in particular explicitly expressed instances in which they chose to brush off jokes or ignore occurrences of racism. Bruce took on the philosophy that one who responds to ignorance is therefore ignorant, while Ron spoke in terms of having thick skin. The concept of the black male body as a threat was explored in subsequent interviews and surfaced as a hindrance in challenging negative stereotypes in their immediate environment.

### **Intergroup Relations: Mainstream Influence on Identity**

#### **Dominant Definitions of Engagement**

As students described their experiences in both mainstream and black organizations on campus, they shed light on the choices which black students generally made in being socially integrated into the campus community. Angela described the structure of racially-based organizations and noticeably her organization, the Coalition of black Students (CBS), was situated under the authority of student union organizations.

In essence, what was considered a black student organization with an unwavering black agenda directly reported to a mainstream structure sponsored by a large network of alumni donors. This particular distinction demanded further probing into the complexity of black student involvement in relation to mainstream engagement. Angela adamantly explained the scrutiny of her organization which called for quality programming but also felt more freedom to advocate for black equality as that was expected of her as the president of CBS. Because the majority of racially-based organizations were housed under the umbrella of the multicultural center, this reporting structure was a nuance which prompted further depiction.

Racial ideology infers a conscious decision with regard to the types of organizations in which individuals actively participate. Therefore I investigated the influence of interactions within a predominantly white campus in illuminating why black students held an either/or mindset in regard to mainstream and racially-based organizations. Dennis perceived black students who participated in solely mainstream organizations almost as if they did not recognize their black identity, or stated more directly, that they were white. He recognized the impact of immersion in those spaces, stating, “There’s a difference between embracing who you are and trying to be something that you’re not.” Participants found it difficult to name more than a few individuals outside of a small circle of black student leaders involved in both organizational types. Greg, as an executive leader of a mainstream and racially-based organization, cautiously stated that black students could be characterized according to

the individuals with whom they chose affiliation. This statement revealed the effects of relations with the dominant group that in a racialized space were seen as negative.

Angela was most vocal about the variance of black student engagement, holding the philosophy that students who solely chose mainstream associations were “not down for black people.” Dennis expressed that a predominantly white upbringing and constant intergroup connections allowed him to maneuver through what he saw as the politics of mainstream organization involvement. He implied that acquiring leadership positions within those groups involved knowing the language and “being able to play the game.” Bruce again described the role of black students in mainstream organizations as a conflict between two worlds: “On one hand you’re struggling with not being black enough, and then on the other hand you’re struggling with trying to reach out to people who don’t want anything to do with you.” This concept of conflicting realities is what Greg described as the greatest contributing factor in the lack of black representation in mainstream organizations. He concluded that most black students do not seek membership in mainstream organizations because they perceive that the end product of interaction will not necessarily reflect the level of effort they put forward. When asked if he thought the face of mainstream organizations would ever change, Greg replied, “I could have attempted to recruit everyone I know into those organizations. How long they would have stayed in said organization once they got there, or if they would’ve even considered it— that’s different.”

Because of the distinct underrepresentation of black students in mainstream organizations, I queried further into Angela’s insistence that black student leaders in

those organizations were not advocates for black concerns. She felt that there would be a definite change in institutional culture if there was advocacy from both sides of the spectrum and not just from black organizations. We engaged in discourse regarding the representative role that many minoritized students take on in interactions with the dominant group. During field observations, I witnessed instances in which students of color felt obligated to challenge ignorant and racialized comments. Ron insisted that in a student government meeting he felt discriminated against after his suggested amendment to a proposal he deemed as inequitable was ignored. Angela talked through limitations minoritized students face in those relationships; within mainstream organizations, black students are constrained as they are elected to represent the general student body. She acknowledged this restriction in reference to her autonomy: “I know nobody is snatching me out of anything, and I’ve never had that fear of what would happen if I said this. I never thought about it like that but that makes a lot of sense.” The notion of heterogeneity became increasingly relevant to the ideal of group representation as participants engaged in discourse on the ways in which their involvement differed. If individuals utilize their presence within certain white spaces as counternarratives to challenge preconceived stigmas, are they not representing their community?

### **Individualism vs. Ascribed Group Identity**

Particularly as we discussed humanist subscale items, participants challenged the concept of individualism in recognizing the external influence of society on identity. In order to deconstruct “Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as black,” Angela called upon the ideal of group connectedness:

There is no individual. People see you and they're going to group you. Why would you not want to be grouped with what you actually are? There is no group of individuals – no. You have to identify yourself as something and it's weird to me if you don't want identify yourself as black. Individual- I hate that word. I don't understand why you can't be your own individual person AND identify yourself as black.

Just as blacks are intrinsically tied to an ascribed group identity, white students at Unity were attached to that same group affiliation. Students used this notion to further challenge items such as “blacks should judge whites as individuals and not as members of the white race.” Greg denoted that patterns of prejudice exhibited by whites along with blacks' encounters with racism caused whites to be viewed under the same standard. However, Angela indicated that it was important to separate individual acts from systemic racism and white privilege.

While group categorization was accepted as human nature, the concept of white individualism took on a different meaning due to the influence of white privilege. Participants challenged the idea of individualism in that blacks and whites are both socially situated within the racialized history of America based on group membership. They noted that particular whites in an attempt to claim individualism worked to acknowledge and remove themselves from an assumed racist superiority. Students proclaimed that in contrast, blacks in pursuit of individualism sought to place themselves above the stereotypical images of inferiority with which they were associated. Dual stereotyping between blacks and whites increased the difficulty of finding

commonalities between the groups. Greg pronounced racial differences as socialization in focusing on variance: “It’s not what’s together in the Venn diagram. It’s not what’s in the middle; it’s what’s on the outside.”

Because of their highly visible status as student leaders on campus, it was through participants’ reflections on the contrast of American identity, black identity, and even attempts to separate themselves as individuals that meaningful connections were made to their representation. Bruce dissected the concept of being trapped in the ideal of being American, in that individuals in an attempt to be accepted often focus on creating an image that blacks do not necessarily have control over. He connoted negativity to individualism only in the sense that it becomes an action to totally remove oneself from group identity. Bruce voiced this distinct ownership of one’s identity: “There’s a difference between acceptance and tolerance. And we have to accept who we are rather than tolerate it.” Dennis captured the contextual influence of the environment in reflecting, “The normal progression in one’s life especially for black males...what that means in society especially in the South. There are so many preconceptions made before you even open your mouth.” While he acknowledged the automatic labeling of society, he also through his affiliations illustrated his ability to self-identify beyond a cultural and generic identity.

In many ways because of a minoritized status in dominantly white spaces, participants’ black identity was synonymous with individuality. Although through his interests and affiliations Ron saw himself as breaking stereotypes of black identity, he still acknowledged the strong influence of group association. He reiterated, “I am my

own person. But part of my own person says I'm black so I'm gonna do things a certain way, or act a certain way, or see the world in a certain way." As students described individuality they spoke in terms of the desire to achieve a wholeness of personal identities rather than a separation from black identity. Amira articulated:

If being black is something that's part of your individuality- it's kind of hard to separate it. I would say more so be an individual, because at the end of the day you're more than just a culture. You're intelligent, physically capable of different things, there are so many other facets besides a culture or skin color that make you, you.

Greg repeated his understanding that black identity should be integrated as a personal acceptance rather than being ascribed by others. Essentially my participants in their attempt to define individuality articulated that the concept can only be known through an established sense of group identity, an acknowledgment which correlates with centrality as well as racial regard.

### **Political/Economic Development: The Perception of Power**

#### **System Representation**

Participants applied the idea of mainstream involvement to the broader context of the American political system and their ideal of black political engagement. Amira adamantly stated that as an Independent political party member she had not voted in local or national elections for some time, mainly because no candidate aligned with her personal principles. In an unconscious way she was fighting the racialized expectations placed on her, as white students at Unity always made the assumption that she voted for

President Barack Obama or was a Democrat strictly because she was black. However, she strongly agreed with the statement “blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.” She explained her desire to gain a military leadership position to impact policies of war with which she disagreed:

My whole rationale is that I want to get on the inside so that I can be the one making those decisions that affect people on the outside. I feel like it’s the same concept with blacks or anybody. If you want something fixed, you gotta go through the inside out.

Although participants expressed the importance of being fully involved in the political system, they recognized power structures which create barriers in blacks gaining equal footholds in the democratic system.

Bruce expressed belief in black representation within the political system yet realized that a power struggle existed beyond voting people into positions of authority. His reflections on political involvement went beyond voting to interrogate the impact of black politicians within such a pervasively racist system which focuses on affirming whiteness:

Representation is paramount because if we don’t, we can always guarantee a small select group people- white people in particular- that want to help us will. They have a mass right behind them that are ready to judge them if they stick their hand out to us.

This statement delineates participation and the actual impact of individuals who seek to integrate a system governed by white privilege, power, and self-interest. Speaking from

his own experiences, Bruce viewed his decision to be involved in mainstream organizations as a mutual exchange: he was contributing to organizations' desire to portray diversity while becoming more knowledgeable of system politics and creating opportunities for other black aspiring leaders. Greg agreed with the need for more black politicians who could sympathize and be the voice for oppressed individuals who have no voice. It was within this space that participants' reflections on the broader political context transformed into self-reflections on their representation of the black student community through their organizational involvement.

Participants challenged the notion of a post-racial society and the false narrative of progress as evidenced by President Obama becoming the first African American to secure that position. Angela expressed her belief that President Obama lacked an agenda focused on fighting black inequalities and relayed, "I consider him mostly symbolic. But I thought the picture of President Obama leaning down and a little black boy reaching up and touching his head— that's powerful." Within this statement lays the dichotomy between the dominant narrative of progress and the felt reality of participants. Dennis and Ron felt that the presidency was a sign of accomplishment and hope for black Americans, but that victory did not necessarily have any effect on the plight of blacks in America. There was a consensus among participants that Barack Obama does not represent the reality of the majority of black Americans, as he is in fact wealthy and a member of elite social circles of status and power. A black president does not change the overwhelming presence of black poverty in the country or signify the end of racism. Referring to the strength of institutional racism, participants recognized that even

President Obama as the highest ranking African American official in the nation functions within a minoritized space in which his legitimacy is constantly questioned.

The assumption could be made that Angela as a stout activist would have reservations about full black participation in the political system, but she fully embraced black participation in America's political realm. She noted the flaw in the activist argument that the system was never made for us, as blacks participate in every other system, such as the economic and educational structures. Angela problematized the concept of activism in that most individuals within that realm either work within the system or outside of the system— not both. As she elaborated:

It doesn't matter how much in the system we're gonna work— that can only change policy, but it's not gonna change culture. You can only vote out so many people and you can only vote for so much policy. That's not gonna change the fact that police officers still see a black man and think danger. I think it has to be both and that's a problem with us now.

What confounded her philosophy on system representation was the fact that she was not involved in mainstream student organizations and affirmed her desire to lend her efforts solely to black organizations. Her suspicion of black student leaders in being genuinely connected to black causes would lead to a greater discussion of communal efforts.

Awareness of the motives behind integration of organizations became a focal point in addressing the question: are black student leaders representing for their community or are they representing themselves? As she reflected on larger communal efforts, Angela verbalized her desire to grasp understanding of other participants'

intentions. She reflected, “It would bother me if I don’t think your motives are pure...why would you even want to be part of what hates you? If you’re not going to try to go in there and change it.” Bruce steered discourse on campus organizations back to the ideal of power when he referred to the concept of selling out. Greg made this connection when speaking of black leaders who accept the representative role and face explicit racism within white spaces as “taking one for the team.” In this sense, the concept of false or misconceived representation began to move the discussion beyond the preconceived stigmas and group norms which influence black student representation. The narrative shifted through participants’ reflections on the burden of black student leaders seen as outliers involved in mainstream spaces to create connectedness back to their black reference group. This was described as the need to change culture, not just the policy of increased black participation. A call for a greater connection to one’s represented group was summarized by Bruce’s critique on self-interest as a motivation to gain individual power. He reflected, “You’ll do whatever it takes to get what you want. Rather than doing it for representation of your community or your group of people. It is important for us to get in the system, but at what cost?”

### **Cultural/Social Activities: Community Norms**

#### **Norms of Black Group Membership**

From our discourse on involvement materialized collective and unspoken rules of black advocacy at Unity. Angela revealed a recent conversation with a black professor regarding who held definite membership in the black student community:

I was telling her about the 400 people I knew. She was like I thought ya'll are [undisclosed number] percent of the population. And I was like you can't really count the people who don't hang out with us. She was like 'why do you get to dictate who's black in the community here or not. If they're black aren't they part of the community?' I was just thinking about these people who are involved in black organizations. If you include everybody which I should be doing – then you see that most people don't want to be part of a black organization.

As we delved into the complexities of the black student community, participants revealed division within a subcommunity influenced by a white institutional space.

Angela detailed the social norms of the “central” black student community:

In our community there's an expectation of behavior. We expect people to do things. We expect people to be an activist in some type of way. I am one of the biggest activists. But there's also people that are gonna notice that they're the only black person in the classroom and are probably gonna say something about it. They aren't gonna let you say weird things about black people. So that's us— that's the 400 of us.

Angela's statement implies that black students who realized their identity in ways outside of this behavioral norm faced possible exclusion. Each individual in my study felt membership within what they considered a black campus community, but they all held different stipulations on the defining characteristics of membership. Amira maintained the ideal that certain black individuals on campus exuded an unwillingness to be tied to black values— for her these individuals would not hold membership. Holding

membership in the multicultural center community, Greg recognized the tendency among black students to stereotype and categorize individuals into subgroups. Yet he also expressed a commonality he often felt just in passing another black male on campus and recognizing that they both existed in that white institutional space. It is this intrinsic connectedness challenged with group membership expectations which would be threaded throughout the stable as well as situational dimensions of racial identity. Within our discussions it was clear that black students exude double efforts of maneuvering through white spaces as minoritized as well as securing a position with their desired reference group of black peers.

An overwhelming divide of the black student community was evident in the distinction between black Greeks and non-Greeks on campus. NPHC organizations were ideal for inclusion in the study as their historical missions were founded on uplift and activism in the black community. As NPHC members Amira and Bruce recognized an obligation to promote a specific organizational focus, but they also sought out connections with white, mainstream fraternities and sororities to become involved in areas previously unexplored by the black student community. Through particular incidents they were made aware that NPHC events were not met with the same level of support as mainstream Greek organizations; these incidents in many ways made them more cognizant of the presence of racism. However, non-Greeks viewed NPHC members as holding a sense of elitism in comparison to other black students. Bruce made sense of this misconception by reflecting on his experiences before becoming

Greek— he recognized that NPHC dual responsibilities in the black community as well as the larger mainstream Greek structure could create a persona of exclusivity.

Angela was the most vocal concerning this particular disconnect and expressed disapproval in the lack of black Greek leadership on campus. She summarized the Greek community as holding self-interest as an isolated subgroup of the black student community and was very hesitant to include Greek members on the CBS staff. On several occasions NPHC fraternities had scheduled programs at the same time as CBS events. These incidents caused confrontations between Angela and fraternity presidents. Angela expressed the perceived elitism displayed by the black Greek community:

We have to get Greeks' schedules, because they have [Greek] weeks and they choose those weeks like eight months in advance. So once they get their weeks we have to put it on our calendar to make sure we don't program on top of Greeks. But it's never reciprocated— ever.

Disconnect between Greek and non-Greek black students has been established in previous research (Harper & Nichols, 2008). This particular disconnect is critical in the context of such a dismal proportion of black students in Unity's student demographics.

Students' responses to "Because America is predominantly white, it is important that blacks go to white schools so that they can gain experience interacting with whites" centered on their opinions of black students who attend historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Just as the title of Bonder created a fabricated sense of inclusion on campus, the title had a supplementary effect on black students in creating a sense of superiority when making comparisons to black outsiders. Angela described the elitism

the Bonder affiliation created for herself and others as “bougie” and contributed disconnect to a lack of knowledge and the inferiority rhetoric surrounding the legitimacy of HBCUs. Greg reiterated this sentiment claiming, “Nothing against HBCUs, but a lot of them don’t carry the same prestige...different schools carry different weight which is the same about every school, but PWIs are more recognized.” They expressed that stereotypes were broken as they visited HBCUs in close proximity and interacted with those black individuals. Bruce regarded black students at HBCUs as more prepared for leadership due to that environment:

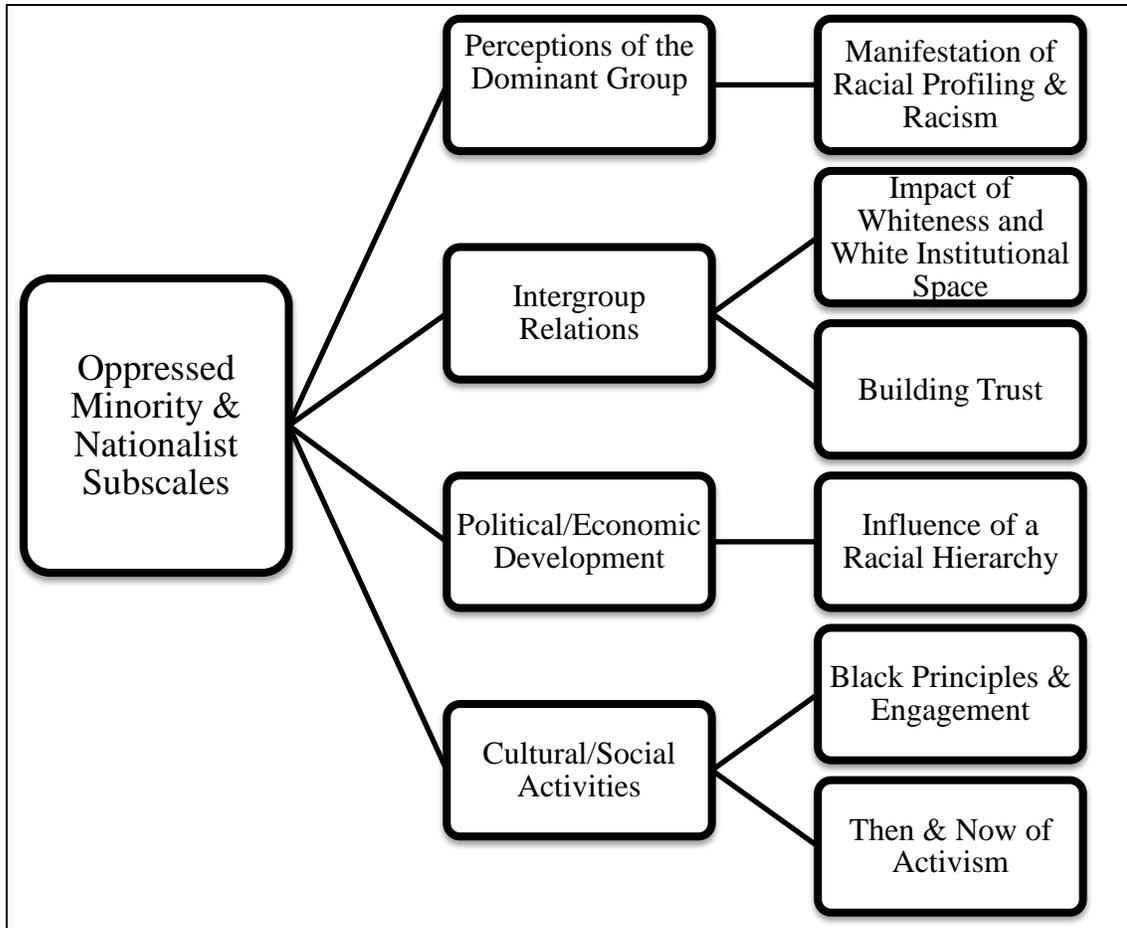
Some of them feel like ‘I go to a black school so I have to be 10 times better than all of these black students, so I’m gonna go for it’...for the most part it takes individuals that are at HBCUs that are outshining to do more... We’re here just content to be in the mix so we just kind of fall back behind the scene.

The power of social construction was evident as well as ironic, in that participants had to challenge perceptions of inferiority surrounding their own black student community at Unity but placed prejudice on outsider black students.

### **Oppressed Minority and Nationalist Subscales**

The third round of interviews focused on the oppressed minority and nationalist subscales. These two areas of racial ideology center on the oppressed sociohistorical perspective of people of color, with the latter placing emphasis on the unique plight of blacks in America (Sellers et al., 1998). Again the ideology discourse related to the following areas of social interaction: 1) perceptions of the dominant group, 2) intergroup relations, 3) political/economic development, and 4) cultural/social activities. For the

subscales of oppressed minority and nationalist, the following themes emerged: manifestation of racial profiling and racism, the impact of whiteness and white institutional space, building trust, the influence of a racial hierarchy, black principles and engagement, and the then and now of activism (see Figure 5.)



**Figure 5. Oppressed Minority and Nationalist Themes**

**Perceptions of the Dominant Group: Sociocultural Influence of Events**

**Manifestation of Racial Profiling and Racism**

Zimmerman found not guilty. I'm broken.

“You died.

I cried.

And kept on getting up.

A little slower.

And a lot more deadly.” —Assata Shakur

I couldn't see my friends. I couldn't speak to my family. I watched a killer go free, another killer of one of our young black babies, and my spirit collapsed.

But, I can breathe again. And that's important. A huge step. I am searching for light and clarity. I don't know when I will find it. However, I know that I am not quitting. I'm still a soldier for equality.

—Excerpt from Angela's reflection journal, July 2013

Halfway through the study during the summer semester, the world reacted to the results of the Trayvon Martin murder case in which a black teenager in Florida was shot by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman. The authors of the MMRI reiterate that some social contexts exist which would be considered racially salient for all African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998); I viewed the trial of George Zimmerman and his acquittal as such an event. Through all of the pain which I personally experienced, my solace came in that the verdict occurred during the summer months when participants did not have to absorb the negative portrayal of blacks within this nationally publicized event while interacting with others on campus. This was understood in the context of students' reflections and archival data which revealed campus racial tensions and blatant

acts of hatred during previous events such as President Obama's election. The semi-structured framework of interviews allowed participants the opportunity to express their emotional reactions to the case. Their theoretical understandings about race came to fruition through such a racially charged social event, and a constructivist methodology allowed for their voices to be heard.

Dennis was away for military training and without a phone; he had no access to the Internet or news data sources. He found out about the verdict two weeks after the decision had been made. Because of his military connections and highly visible status on campus, Dennis always made it a point not to discuss politics or any racialized social events. In his reflections after the case however, he revealed racial cognizance in his white peers' reaction to the verdict:

Among other people there was a sense of happiness that he got off... You could tell from their expressions. For that particular trial it's so hard to separate race and the actual issue or what actually happened. So you have mixed feelings about it because you don't know if people are happy because the white man got off or because justice was served – so I think that's kind of a touchy thing.

The effects of the trial which created a black/white dichotomy of racial attitudes in America made Dennis all the more situationally aware of his position and the social implications of which the average student was not cognizant. He specified, "You try to subconsciously do things to not make yourself look as much as a threat. So that means if you're working at night – take your hat off. Make sure you're walking in lighted areas." Dennis previously spoke of being legitimized through his position, and although he was

probably the most comfortable of my participants with white students, the not guilty verdict solidified his feeling of racial consciousness in such an elevated status.

Angela was up North at a conference for an upcoming national youth activist group when the verdict came in, and she shared her painful reaction to the not guilty verdict:

We all stood together, held hands, all of us crying. Because the energy you immediately knew—the verdict’s coming in too fast. Whenever it came in not guilty—man that was the worst. We were screaming. It was like you told me my mother had just died. I fell to the ground, it was awful.

Angela resolved to quit her activism and went into a depression, but others looking to her for action did not allow her to remain in that state. After participation on a student panel for a nationally syndicated news program and through the process of reflection Angela realized, “It had to be a not guilty verdict. If there would’ve been a guilty verdict we would’ve been so appeased. We would’ve kept on with our lives.” She was all the more resolved to use her leadership to give others a voice in the fight against injustice.

Bruce upon hearing the verdict was in total disbelief but focused his attention more on what he considered would be a “conscious hostile society” moving forward in his senior year at Unity. In his reaction he placed emphasis on using the tragedy of the social event as fuel in his personal endeavors:

It didn’t necessarily scare the crap out of me, but it was a wake-up call.

Reminding me that the margin of error is weak...I’m seeing all of these opinions

surface. It's reminded me that obviously I'm here for a reason, and if I wasn't business oriented before everything has to be that way now.

Bruce had emerged as the most vocal about the reflection he had been engaged in through the course of the study, and through this social event was reminded of the struggle and fight against oppression. He became all the more determined to fight the stigma of blacks in America through his counternarrative of excellence.

Although Greg generally refrained from reacting to others through social media on such racially charged events, he did notice the disregard of the worth of African American lives. He shared his own personal reflections on black inferiority:

It didn't really open my eyes because I already knew that my worth as a black individual, let alone a black man, was pretty low. My life is not valued as much as I believe it should be. The inequality of our judicial system kind of got brought to light.

In our discussion we delved into the topic of respectability politics, a racialized theoretical perspective associated with the thought that individuals could lessen the likelihood of racism if they presented themselves in ways deemed acceptable by the dominant viewpoint. For example, if black males did not sag their pants, they would not be racially profiled and avoid a demise like Trayvon Martin. Greg debated both sides of the perspective and concluded in this fabricated justification that regardless of how black individuals look; they will still be racialized and deemed inferior.

Ron resided in another city for a summer internship and became frustrated with conversations being held through social media with his peers at Unity. Even though he

chose not to participate in social media discussions as well, he expressed a point at which he was provoked to challenge individuals who showed no racial empathy:

We just want you to listen to the side of the story that not all black Americans feel is heard...I had to leave a group text, because this dude said I don't owe anything to the blacks, I owe more to the Jews than the blacks. I was like oh I'm leaving this group! He was like why do all these blacks think we owe them something?

While Ron recognized the need for more genuine discussions on social prejudice, he agreed with certain aspects of respectability politics by acknowledging that change also had to come from within the black community.

In preparation for a career in the Air Force, Amira was the least involved in social interactions surrounding the case. She made sense of the trial by focusing on the faulty wording used in the case that prevented the jurors from prosecuting George Zimmerman. In moving forward Amira insisted that issues such as racial profiling would have to be addressed on a national scale:

Even Oprah gets racially profiled! It is a problem that's gonna continue to grow. Even though we're over the hump – not post-racial – there's such a whole lot more. We're over Mount Everest but we still have Kilimanjaro and all these other things. A little bit smaller but they're still ginormous in perspective.

This particular social event is of noteworthy significance to the study in the contribution of qualitative methodology to the understanding of racial attitudes. If the MIBI had been utilized in its original form, these insights which have direct correlations to students'

behaviors would never have been captured. Students' growth and self-reflection was deeply evident through participation in the study, as they often referenced their own journal entries that had been inspired by previous interviews. Surveys as a snapshot of racial attitudes would not allow for insight into that process.

### **Intergroup Relations: The Effect of Whiteness**

#### **Impact of White Institutional Space**

Newly charged with an intense awareness of the sociocultural impact of racial stigmas, we focused on the racial realities of their immediate environment as well as the dominant values threaded throughout society. As we tackled the notion that “the dominant society devalues anything not white male oriented,” they called upon issues such as the standard of beauty and interracial marriage to make meaning of the influences of society on their own attitudes about race. For my male participants, their articulate speech was pointed out on many occasions by not only whites but their black counterparts with the implication that being articulate is not a quality of the black group. During the summer, Ron chatted with a white couple at the movies and overheard the wife whispering to her friend, “Oh my God he’s so polite- I wasn’t expecting him to be that polite.” This along with utterances in other encounters such as “he’s attractive for a black guy” created a feeling of foreignness for Ron, almost as if he was alien to some dominant group members at Unity.

Amira was perturbed by the fact that because she has natural and curly hair, she was often met with questions regarding what race she was “mixed with.” She would respond with a resounding, “I’m black!” She applied the false narrative of the white

standard to greater societal concerns in America's focus on white males. She employed a controversial incident in the news in which a student organization desired to be called the "White Alliance Council" to relay her point:

We really don't ever put an emphasis on something that is white male in the title... But you will say all kind of Asian, Hispanic, black, women, gays. It's assumed that it's gonna be that, and if it's not that, you have to deviate and assert that it's whatever.

The ideal that blacks should not marry interracially was included in the humanist and nationalist constructs, and participants held the consensus that individuals should marry whoever they choose to love. However, they described the historical condemnation of individuals who made that decision which complicated their response.

Bruce indicated that he was attracted to beautiful women regardless of their nationality but also recognized the impact of the dominant narrative in the ability to create ingroup division. He detailed his mother's insistence that he marry a black woman:

I still feel that love is love, but I understand what she was saying— if we're not gonna believe in our own women then who will? It didn't really occur to me until what my mom said finally clicked— it looked like black men don't care. I honestly feel like that's so not true...I had to say I don't want to believe that!

As a black woman having been compared throughout my life to a lighter standard of beauty, I understood the impact of the dominant group's worldview on students' reflections of self-worth. Angela as biracial was adamant that she would marry a black

man, believing that as oppressed individuals blacks should marry someone who is down for the cause. As a feminist she embraced creating her own standards of beauty within a circle of friends consisting of black women with natural hair. However, Angela noted females of all races chasing after a dominant standard of beauty:

Whenever you feel like you have to go through society...they take on white supremacist, patriarchal ways. We are so in love with what it means to be a black woman physically, so whenever I stepped out of that- like all of my white friends dress the same. Why do ya'll dye your hair blonde- it blows my mind every time.

As participants worked to overcome a predominant societal standard, the various campus spaces themselves conveyed a white dominant presence. When speaking of white spaces the most problematic known in the black student community was the racism experienced in a local nightlife area. Although the bars and nightclubs were not directly affiliated with Unity, Westpark was one of the most prominent examples of racism from the onsite of my study. As described in our discussions, black students were often denied entry into clubs, given the explanation that they were not wearing the appropriate clothing. Being that Unity is located in a small college town, students lacked a variety of social options and braved the bars despite their racist reputations. Angela over the summer experienced that racism directly. She adamantly opposed socializing in Westpark but reluctantly agreed to go with her friends. She detailed being denied entry into a club for failing to have their student identification cards:

I said okay so who do you have to ask for student IDs? I was like who did your manager tell you to ask for IDs from— black people right? I said don't play me and went off. Tamara asked these two white people that just got in- hey did ya'll have to show your student IDs- they were like no what are you talking about?

The bouncer was like you need to go before I call the cops.

This particular incident supported the constant cognizance of racism from the dominant group, but the reaction of one of Angela's friends also revealed group disconnect in response to such acts. Vanessa, whom Angela described as half black and half white, got upset when Tamara confronted the bouncer, expressing that if Tamara had not they would have gained entry. Angela explained: "So Vanessa was like he was gonna let us in— Tamara went off. She was like why are you not down for this! Why don't you even understand the issue? You're gonna have black children!" This confrontation exemplifies the impact of a dominant perspective. Black students who did not view this incident as racially salient might experience friction in their interactions with other black students. This incident highlighted the need for greater dialogue on the norms of group membership as students maneuver through a white space.

### **Building Trust**

The ideals of trust and harmony between blacks and whites were brought up in nationalist constructs, and participants challenged a romanticized worldview particularly in the context of a racially charged society following Trayvon Martin's murder. Angela recognized the dissimilarity between her immediate relationships with white friends and the broader concept of unity:

I think we live in a world of injustice and hate and evil. So I don't think the world can ever be in harmony about anything...But I think we can live in a world where the system doesn't attack us, so when you as an individual attack me then I have a means of protecting myself other than just trying to go after you.

Again this delineation between the system and individual racism was important in the context of relationship building with the dominant group. Participants were clear that although a reputation of racism existed at Unity, they encountered such compassionate people within the campus community. Amira reiterated particular moments when white people had looked out for her as the only black in a predominantly white situation.

In regard to barriers in the black community to fully trusting whites, Greg pronounced, "We're a community who has seen ourselves get lied to a lot. So it's hard to trust. From those experiences we've come to believe that the only ones who have our backs are us." From this viewpoint, the black community was described as using caution when building connections with outsiders. Bruce likened the relationship with whites to a relationship with a significant other, outlining two approaches to trust: an individual can begin by giving trust until it is broken or begin by requiring the other person to earn trust. The majority of participants expressed the appeal of the latter taking into account previous incidents with racism. Dennis labeled this belief as not necessarily wary but rather realistic. Amira referred to the tendency of the campus community to either ignore black-white differences or to involve itself in a climate filled with tension and hostility when racialized events occurred. Ron imparted the same sentiment in that an increase of racial empathy was needed in moving forward. Bruce stated, "The word

relationship should be the word of the day because it's a two-way street. Because if one person isn't in it- it's not at all." The sustained caution within the black community in attempting to build relationships recognized the limited agency individuals have if that effort is not reciprocated by the dominant group.

### **Political/Economic Development: Racial Separation**

#### **Influence of a Racial Hierarchy**

There exists a tendency to lump all people of color under the term "minority," with the assumption being made that all subgroups have common connections to being oppressed in America. Feagin (2013) speaks of the racial hierarchy in white individuals' attempts to maintain superiority over other races. Within his depiction of the white racial frame, he reiterates that throughout United States history no group has been more central to this racialized structure than black Americans. As we began discourse regarding the comparison of the oppression of blacks to other racialized groups, my participants first identified the forces behind the predisposition to oppress: the concept of inferiority and inclination to acquire power over others, white supremacy, patriarchy, ignorance, and the preservation of societal status.

Students had different viewpoints on societal framing of other groups labeled as oppressed. For example due to his strong religious beliefs, Dennis was raised under the viewpoint that the LGBT lifestyle was immoral; he verbalized frustration in that a white student had challenged his lack of support on LGBT efforts. Dennis was taken aback by the implication that there was no difference— if he had been oppressed because of his black group membership, why would he curtail others' rights? Participants recognized

the plight of other racialized groups in the country, citing groups such as Hispanics, Arab Americans, Asians, and women as oppressed. However, they gave strong evidence to understanding that a racial hierarchy, also referred to as a racial ladder, existed with blacks being placed at the bottom; this cognizance made it difficult to fully embrace the idea that the oppression or racism those groups experienced was comparable to the black struggle. Angela had previously stated, “A struggle is a struggle. Inequality is inequality,” but later clarified the awareness of a racial hierarchy with a contradictory statement:

Racism and prejudice against black people is so rooted into the system that it allows for a murderer to be nationally broadcasted and discussed and the killer to get off free... Yeah we can talk about oppression— but racism? They didn’t create laws that you were less than a person.

Participants articulated the ways in which the racial hierarchy functioned to divide oppressed groups and to maintain the notion of black inferiority. Bruce recognized that other cultures at one time were used to oppress blacks, for example with European Americans passing on stories of black inferiority to Native Americans as they attempted to civilize them. Ron clarified that the racism experienced by other minoritized groups was not as harsh as the insecurity “circling around” black individuals as a fear of imminent adversity. Amira recognized the inclination of the white racial frame to indoctrinate racial stigmas even into the minds of oppressed groups, such as the stereotype that workers of Mexican descent are hired because of their willingness to

receive lower wages. These examples provided evidence of the barriers to forming connections with other minoritized groups, particular within the PWI space at Unity.

Alliances among various subgroups at Unity which would be considered as oppressed due to their racialized history were very few and only seemed to exist superficially to support a campus diversity rhetoric. Bruce mentioned a yearly event thrown by a Hispanic organization of which a lot of black students attended but noted that once it was over people returned to their separate subgroup spaces. Greg admitted that co-programming among racially-based organizations should occur frequently but rarely did, and he focused on the broader ideal of coalitions involving distinct and dissimilar agendas. He delineated, “Both groups would have to— either one or both— put their issues on the backburner and focus on something else. It might be harder to come up with a joint issue.” Influences of a white institutional presence also provided challenges to alliances. An indication of separation was built by the dominant conservative view on campus which discouraged individuals as well as collective groups from speaking up. Bruce explained this hesitation of subgroups to form coalitions as an “us” versus “them” effect. Students in subgroups at Unity are given an automatic categorization as “minorities,” but as Angela stated, “a lot of Hispanics on campus that I talk to don’t actually feel as though they’re oppressed on campus.” A dissonance between blacks and other groups existed, in that blacks felt marginalization as the most stigmatized group but yet a sense of resilience in being able to overcome challenges.

Ron as a representative in student government disclosed that there seemed to be an outside force against coalitions forming within such a politically correct environment.

He specified the resilience of the white frame by stating, “If all of the races got together and formed an organization, then someone from the outside is gonna be like that’s racist.” While the barriers to alliances remained at Unity, there was discussion of strategies to form coalitions and for students to see similarities in the struggles they experienced. Ron expressed interest in forming coalitions with other minoritized representatives and recalled that a Hispanic representative engaged him in a dialogue to be mindful of who he was representing and to fight any actions that might be discriminatory. Amira recently had made efforts to team up with sororities from the Multicultural Greek Council to start a beauty program that brought awareness to issues felt by various groups. Her ultimate goal was to break down racial stigmas between groups through greater focus on common problems that all groups faced:

If we look to some of the smaller problems, it would make the bigger problems seem easier to handle. Something I read in a book— they had this huge boulder in front of them and they were like how are we gonna move this? And then someone said there were a bunch of little rocks at the bottom. So they sat there and picked up the little rocks, and soon enough, the big rock just fell away.

Continued unwillingness to look past one’s own subgroup hindered what participants viewed as the opportunity to build a stronger coalition against campus marginalization.

### **Cultural/Social Activities: Group Values**

#### **Black Principles and Engagement**

As they undertook the nationalist construct item “blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values,” students engaged in reflection of what the word

Afrocentric meant to them. Dennis made the point that Afrocentrism, particularly for outside races, scared many individuals not versed in culture. Bruce referred to a spiritual component as he reiterated that within the search for an Afrocentric focus that individuals should not lose their sense of self. He expressed the juxtaposition sometimes seen in individualism and Afrocentrism as he stated, “I believe it’s important for us to know our soul. I don’t think we have to completely shut off the outside world to obtain that.” Dennis and Amira both emphasized that some individuals were too extreme in their ethnic portrayals on campus, with Amira making clear that an extremist approach can have the opposite effect of disengaging others. She actually spoke of one particular girl on campus who was “extremely Afrocentric,” and her actions as being “too much.” I immediately knew she might possibly be referring to Angela, because she herself recognized the constant battle she was engaged in as a self-described activist. I contrast Amira and Angela’s voices and attitudes toward Afrocentrism here to highlight the dissonance held within a subgroup of students often assumed to hold the same beliefs by outsiders. The variance of their views exemplifies disconnect and the misunderstanding that inside group members have of one another.

To illustrate her perception of how individualism was destroying her ideal of Afrocentric values, Angela spoke of two black women she encountered in the surrounding black community in regard to her prior tutoring endeavors:

They were like how much do you charge— I was like I wouldn’t charge to educate your child! I was like it’s crazy how capitalism [works] - I will help other individuals and you have to financially give me everything. We don’t do

anything for anybody anymore. It's like this idea that if you're good at it you never do it for free...I hate Eurocentric values so much.

The simplicity in the ideal of a unified community of people was an inspiring example of Angela's commitment to fight injustice. However her understandings were not generally adopted by other black students, being that as Angela stated, we live in a system highly influenced by capitalism and also dominated by whiteness.

Amira explained her approach to Afrocentrism as the caution one should take in possibly losing themselves in the effort to adopt a certain image:

It's nice to know about your roots. But I don't think you should let it [be] – all I have to embrace is Afrocentrism. And you turn into a completely different person that you don't even want to be...if you're just trying to do it so that you can kind of be – well I need to accept my blackness...then don't do it...Because you're only gonna be unhappy.

Her perceptions of a nationalist ideology centered on black values demonstrated how individuals like Angela would be negatively typecast to some within the black community.

Angela shared through several instances the arguments she encountered as she accepted the fight to challenge all forms of oppression, even with others within the black student community. She once found herself in conflict through social media with a particular black fraternity that posted a promotional party flier which featured a provocative caricature of a black woman with her hind side exposed:

I got so upset— I was like nobody’s gonna say anything about this flier- ya’ll are just gonna go to this party? People were like ‘what are you talking about?’ What am I talking about! So y’all are gonna let a Greek organization that was founded to better the black community – put this trash on your timeline?

Because of her efforts the fraternity changed the image to a more respectful portrayal, but through these fights Angela was known to some as an extremist. She referred to the murder of Trayvon Martin as her black revelation in life, and within the 45 days that George Zimmerman was not arrested existed only through the lens of raising awareness. In verbalizing the conflict she stated, “Oh man if you weren’t talking about Trayvon Martin – why are you talking about anything else! I lost so many friends. This black community HATED me. Here comes Angela – walk away.” The noteworthy dynamic of Angela’s activism is that she was praised by peers for involvement in the national fight against injustice. But her focus on black values was thought of as too much, particularly when her challenges were geared toward the black student community itself.

In addition to the dissonance regarding the definition of black values, participants also recognized the need for incorporation of black history knowledge beyond what was taught in schools. Participants felt a strong connection to black culture but yet were deeply involved in mainstream campus life; in many ways this broke the myth that black students integrated into white activities lack connections to black values. Although NPHC fraternities and sororities appear to be the premium outlet to advocate for cultural awareness, Bruce mentioned the resistance of his fraternity brothers as he pushed for

cultural events. He used an analogy to symbolize the apathy of the black student community and disregard of the struggle for civil rights that our ancestors took on:

Your granddad has tried so hard to save the money to get you this car – and you don't really take care of the car! You don't get the oil changed – so after a while it's just gonna break down – everything is gonna fall and crumble.

Referring back to Amira and Bruce's discussion of attempts to create greater connections with the mainstream Greek community, it is not clear if these efforts aided in modifying the focus of the NPHC community. However, there was evidence of a perception in the black community that this was occurring.

A critical piece within the discourse of black engagement which my students worked to dispel is the notion that Afrocentrism or strong ties to black values equates total submersion and rejection of things not centered on black culture. Even Angela as a black activist dismissed the viewpoint that black people must organize themselves into a separate black political force. She elaborated, "I feel like that's so unproductive. We're not living in 1876 where there are areas that don't have a solid political organized structure. We're in 2013- we participate in that system." Greg agreed that separation along racial lines would cause further divide— reiterating that maintenance of a strict black agenda would create further barriers to coalitions.

### **The Then and Now of Activism**

A concept which emerged from our discussion on Afrocentrism was discourse regarding the plight of black America in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. It was during the third interview that the reflective relationship between the researcher and

participants fully revealed itself. During one particular moment Greg and I discussed the negative portrayal of blacks through reality shows such as *Love and Hip Hop* as boisterous and vulgar and rap artists who sent a message of ignorance, vanity, and self-indulgence. As we moved through the change in black culture from the Civil Rights Movement, I rhetorically uttered the statement, “Where did we go wrong?” Greg and I spent a significant amount of time comparing the narrative of that era with the black America of today, during which he situated the discourse in the need to look more in-depth at the narrative of the past versus the present. The Civil Rights era is surrounded by a false narrative portraying all blacks at that time as unified to work for change; in comparison the black community of today appears to be lacking that unity. Angela iterated that sentiment: “When you think back to the narrative – we thought everybody was in this and were all gonna fight the man... But you still had those people who were like that’s not my fight.”

This false narrative magnified the problem of a negative black image, particularly in that individual efforts often seemed insignificant in the face of such overwhelming stigmas. Greg stressed that black individuals needed to focus on the problems currently facing the community instead of looking to the past in a nostalgic gaze. He illuminated, “As a people we have evolved and antiquated values can’t be our basis. Just know your past and relate what you can, but you can’t go back and expect that to work.” Angela pronounced frustration in that current activism was constantly being compared to the past, stating, “We have to figure out how to invent a new wheel, it’s not about reinventing the old wheel – it’s not working for us.” She referred to the

groundwork of the Civil Rights era as a blueprint, with the caution that what worked back then was not applicable to the black America of today.

The ideal of a black community stripped of its resolve to fight injustice in the wake of a new narrative of indifference created frustration, and our discourse reflected a critical approach to avoid internalization of these negative images. Angela had been following the work of the Dream Defenders, an activist group based in Florida that after George Zimmerman's release hosted a long-term sit-in at the state capital to challenge the stand your ground law—the premise for the not guilty verdict. She viewed that type of engagement as truly impactful rather than the impulsive responses often elicited in today's culture. In responding to the statement, "Where did we go wrong?" Greg likened the expressionism mirrored into today's black youth as stemming from the 1990s when rappers began excessively flaunting their status to show that they "made it" through the struggle. He recognized the need for more attention on the successes of common people and the use of education as a tool to shift the ignorance of media portrayals.

Angela was able to experience first-hand the power of activism in creating resilient black student leaders when she participated in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary March on Washington with her national black youth activist group. We spoke at length about the entire experience, from the power of their chants as they marched to the capital to her opportunity to meet with over 150 Dream Defender members whom she had been following on social media for over a year and a half over the course of the weekend. Angela spoke with passion about the incident which occurred after she returned when

Phillip Agnew, the director of the Dream Defenders, was cut from the official program featuring President Barack Obama. Her collective group speculated that Agnew was cut because in his speech he verbalized his disapproval for President Obama's use of drones. Even through their outrage as they responded with their insistence to be heard, Angela's interactions during this monumental event solidified a counternarrative to the false depiction of a lack of dedication to the fight against inequality in today's youth.

In response to Phillip Agnew's speech being cut, Angela along with others in her group used social media to put together two minute speeches in support of the current activist movement, and during our discourse she had the opportunity to reflect on the disconnect of the then and now of activism:

The older generation – there's definitely a generational gap – not with activists but a movement. So the generation of the 60s – they don't actually respect our movement...we're still dealing with these things, and we're not blaming you – but we're saying that something happened. Ya'll never let go of it – why do Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton still feel like they have a place to say something? They shouldn't feel like they have a place – in 15 years I'm not gonna be speaking about things that are affecting 20 year olds in the same way that I'm doing now.

The historic, even symbolic white framing around civil rights activists has created a dominant perspective to which current youth activists are constantly compared. They are often criticized when they showed resistance to being restricted within that comparative frame. Angela returned to Unity reenergized to stay on course with her local activism as a freedom fighter with a deeper understanding of these challenges.

The ideal that the fight against injustice and representation in the black community does not look the same for each individual brought the focus directly back to student involvement at Unity. Discourse created a cyclical process directly related to the stigma of the black student community that one type of involvement is preferred over the other. Angela continued to work through this revelation as she challenged her own beliefs regarding what values should look like:

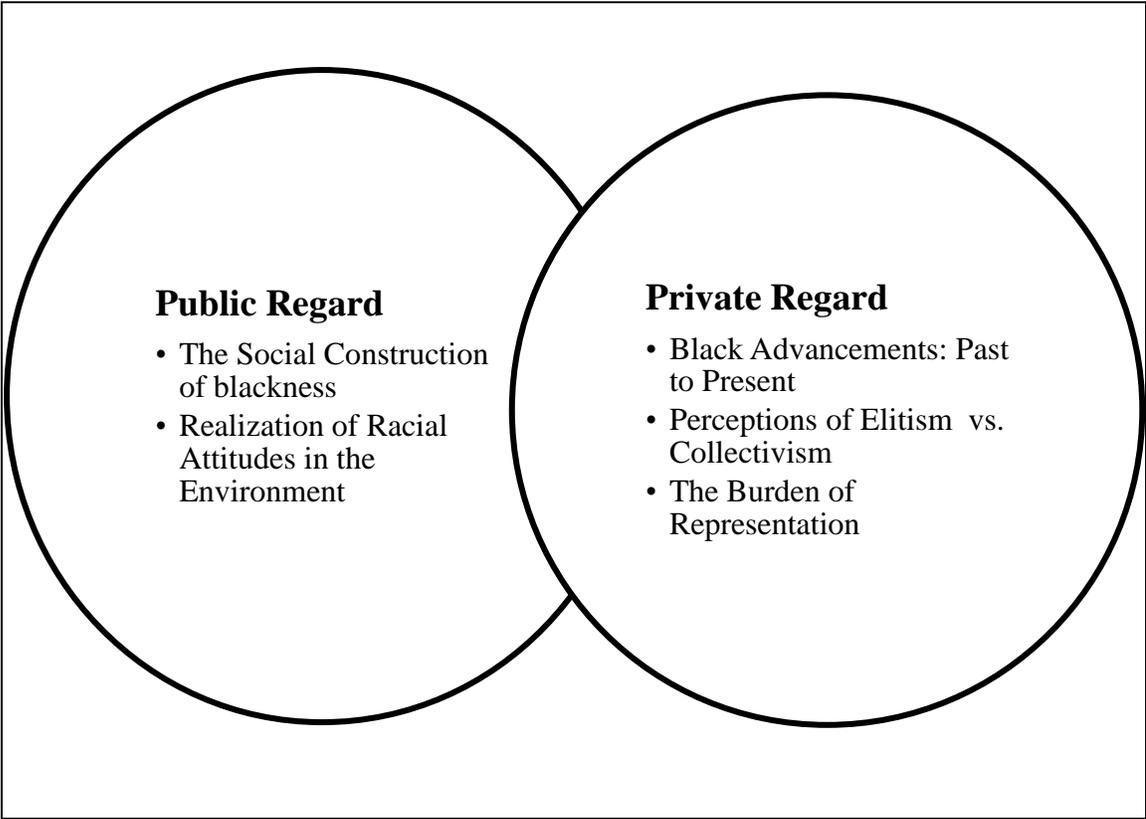
Everyone has a role in the movement...we definitely all have a responsibility – how we choose to act in that responsibility is so different...People ask me all the time- who did you like better Malcolm or Martin – I don't like either one of them better because they were both needed. At the same time they were both needed. If it would've been just one or the other we would have gotten nowhere. That's what I think we don't see today is that we're all needed.

Her reflection on the heterogeneity of black engagement represents the divided consciousness of the black student community regarding black as well as mainstream organizational representation. This critical perspective highlighted the need to be reflective of the exclusion and judgments placed on individuals and their expressions of involvement. I equate Angela's critique with the ideal that both organizational memberships are necessary, valuable, and should be equally embraced.

### **Racial Regard**

The dimension of racial regard consists of private as well as public attitudes toward black group membership. This portion of the study therefore concentrated on detailing in-depth influences on each area of regard which produce positive and negative

attitudes as well as establishing connections between the two subscales. During content analyses of the fourth set of interviews, participants' responses were intentionally not separated to represent subscale themes of private and public regard as separate. Instead content was analyzed as a comprehensive understanding of the dimension. Therefore, there is a representation threaded throughout the regard themes (see Figure 6) on how public regard directly relates to and complements private regard.



**Figure 6. Public and Private Regard Themes**

## **Public Regard**

### **The Social Construction of Blackness**

Students critiqued the general vague wording of several of the construct items as they expressed deeper meanings of the complexity of social constructions of race. For example, in response to the construct “blacks are considered good by others,” Greg brought to light the politically correct nature of society that has transformed blatant racism into an air of politeness masking deeper prejudices. Bruce challenged the notion that blacks were respected by others, in that the concept of respect in reference to black individuals equated fear. He noted that if the lights were turned off in a room, other individuals around him would be clutching their purses. Just as blacks use caution in trusting whites, Ron applied the same theory to the consciousness they kept of negative stigmas which guided whites’ attitudes and decisions. The negative stigmas deeply embedded into the psyche of many of their white counterparts were constantly displayed in daily interactions. A white student sitting behind Amira at a Unity football game commented on a black player fumbling the ball, stating “It’s because of all that rap music.” Stereotypes for whites acted as the filters used to interpret black behaviors, which was extremely detrimental in the setting of Unity where many students had never experienced direct interaction with blacks. At Unity, negative became the norm for black behavior and positive the exception.

The power of social construction was related to the dominant worldview of race at Unity. Angela emphasized that language associated black with bad and white with good, creating a subconscious social construction through which everything was

evaluated. A narrative of negative black stereotypes was so pervasive that it built a homogenous view of blacks. Angela outlined the power of dominant white framing:

The dominant group controls the narrative. You have conversations that seem positive about black people— ya'll are such good athletes. But it's not actually positive. There are things that because they are racially linked are problematic. But in and of themselves are not negative.

The strength of a racialized narrative was displayed as participants explained their understandings of that narrative. Greg took a hip hop philosophy class in which he expressed his opinion that black people often allow themselves to be seen in a negative light. His professor challenged this rationale by stating that black people are not at fault for adding a negative narrative to their actions. Feagin (2013) speaks of the white racial frame being so pervasive that it can infiltrate the minds of people of color; Greg in working through his beliefs highlighted a tool of the white racial frame in blaming the oppressed for being oppressed.

Understanding the resilience and scope of negative black stigmas created by a dominant white frame was central to students' identity, in that they could use their understandings of the systemic nature of racism to avoid internalization. Ron adamantly expressed that being black was considered cool and recognized that blacks have a significant influence on pop culture such as with hip hop music. However, Greg in expressing the ability of black culture to change vernacular and trends also acknowledged that this power scared many in power. Angela spoke of current trends such as the popular white vocalist Miley Cyrus taking the commonly used term for

dancing in the black community “twerking” and receiving national attention. Angela recognized this occurrence as inadequate cultural appropriation, in which surface aspects of black culture are adopted without giving proper credit or seeking more profound understandings of black culture. Disinterest in black values from the dominant group ultimately was tied to the maintenance of power and privilege. Greg expressed, “There’s no reason for anyone to change their way of thinking while in power, while the system is in their favor, while I’m untouchable.”

### **Realization of Racial Attitudes in the Environment**

Because students were seen as highly involved student leaders within the campus community, their interactions gave them additional insight into the reasons why the majority of black students fulfilled involvement through racially-based organizations. Greg stated that as an executive leader of three different groups in mainstream as well as black organizations, he had an experience at Unity that most black students did not have. He referred to this difference as some sort of crossover appeal but did not romanticize his efforts as being hailed as a trailblazer by his black counterparts. Greg instead described his classmates’ reactions as uninterested when they commented on his affiliation in “those white groups.” While Ron believed that more black students should break the mold and become involved in traditional organizations in order to shift the stigmas surrounding the community, he denoted fear of acceptance as a cause of black students not joining. Greg reflected this same sentiment of proactive rejection held by some black students: “My stereotype of them is that they’re stereotypical of me.”

According to Dennis, the demographically homogenous backgrounds of many black students made them uncomfortable around white students. He disclosed that his background in white spaces allowed him to feel comfortable in going for those roles. Not only did branching out beyond black student activities require a willingness to embrace traditions of the dominant culture, but the organizational structure of student activities itself caused barriers to black leadership. Dennis spoke extensively of the lack of black student leaders in high positions such as the study body president and noted the extra sense of legitimacy black students would have to possess to achieve such a status. Amira utilized her ROTC relationship with Dennis to relay her thoughts on the stigma surrounding traditional organizations:

I did not like him at first— like oh you're just gonna hang around white people. He really just wanted to join a fraternity...being Traditions Holder ended up being his niche and that's what I wanted for him...But now black people see— oh we have a black Traditions Holder. He started coming to Greek stuff and parties and programs— they [black students] think this boy just loves to hang around black people. So the fact that he stepped out and did a white thing— they were like oh. Maybe it's not as bad as we thought, maybe nobody had been trying.

In conveying this sentiment, Amira relayed that black students would assume that a black student leader's decision to affiliate with a traditional organization as the first equated to a desire to embrace white culture.

Attitudes toward blacks held by the dominant student body had effects on the ways participants exhibited a commitment to excellence. Greg declared that he had not experienced any blatant disrespect on campus. But he existed in a constant state of awareness to keep his interactions on a surface level to avoid scenarios that might provoke him to react and fulfill a stigma others held of him. Ron had recently stopped a black classmate from fighting when confronted by a racial slur from a Hispanic student in Westpark; he remained very mindful of campus racial tension. Amira held that there was a 70/30 percent balance between a positive and negative view of blacks on campus. She noted that most white students could care less about an individual's background or race as long as they were immersed in Bonder culture. This colorblind approach of supposed inclusiveness created the opposite effect of making black students reluctant to support university traditions. Amira, who fully embraced Bonder culture, expressed disappointment that the majority of her black peers and sorority sisters were disinterested in mainstream involvement: "What was the point of coming to Unity...it's a normal thing that I do. I just happen to do it with a lot of white people." For her this reaction necessitated dialogue and an increased effort to engage her black peers.

Amira also challenged the false assumption by many students that Unity had implemented an affirmative action policy to increase diversity. The notion that black students did not gain admission to Unity on their own merit added another expenditure of energy that black students had to address, often in the form of microaggressions and verbal attacks by peers. Amira expressed her frustration with this racial framing:

Someone threw in a sly comment, I think freshman year. They were talking about affirmative action. Did you use affirmative action to get in? I was like no. They were like how did you get in? I was the top 13% with 102 GPA, and was 108th of my class of 800 people. That's how I got in. I just don't understand these assumptions.

This instance exemplifies the effect of the white racial frame in reproducing the assumption that students of color are less intelligent and academically capable than white students (Moore & Bell, 2011). As Amira described, whites discuss affirmative action in ways that focus on the ideal of reverse racism or how such policies can benefit them, thus working to affirm white privilege and rejecting notions of inequality and racism.

### **Private Regard**

#### **Black Advancements: Past to Present**

Just as they made comparisons in the racial ideology discourse of past and present narratives of activism, participants also made these associations in regard to racial regard. When speaking of the major accomplishments and advancements made by black individuals, students recognized the monumental strides achieved in the area of equality and civil rights led by black efforts. Ron noted that individuals being acknowledged as firsts during the Civil Rights era created a reverence around those acts that made today's black accomplishments held in less regard. There existed an understanding that large-scale innovations currently made by blacks are not only less emphasized but also surrounded by a different type of group stigma. Dennis related this

to a general feeling of complacency among blacks. He insisted, “The more duress, the more social pressure or discrimination a group is under— the more unity there is. There’s not necessarily pressure on the black community here.” Angela added that it was not due to a lack of activism but instead the intensity of black power concentrated among a particular group of individuals in that era; the fact that black activism was now a commonplace reality added to a false narrative that a current movement did not exist.

A sense of reduced unity among blacks continued to construct a sentiment of individualism rather than collectivism in the accomplishments of blacks. Greg challenged a common social narrative that the greatest black accomplishment of the current era was the election of President Barack Obama, an anecdote used by the dominant society as justification that blacks have “made it.” Bruce tied individual achievements of black students at Unity to the possible complacency that those accomplishments might create, even using Dennis as an example:

Dennis is the third Traditions Holder and the first in a long time. What happens if someone runs next year? Are we gonna say- oh you know we had one last year, it doesn’t matter if he wins or not.

Bruce emphasized the importance of paving the way for others, as successful blacks are often seen as an exception to the rule and remaining stigmas hinder other blacks from attempting to follow. He stressed that as a second and third black advancement is made in the same area, that pattern breaks stigmas and begins to be seen as the norm. Increased collective efforts were seen as a necessity by Bruce, as he explicated, “One person can make some noise, but a group can make a great echo.”

Preservation of a negative black narrative by the dominant society was suggested to be countered by an increase of black role models, less emphasis on black celebrities as the standard of excellence, and greater focus on black history and accomplishments. Participants highlighted the connection between public and private regard; this linkage manifested in an understanding that an absence of knowledge on past contributions of the black community had a damaging effect on current community efforts. Amira was especially adamant about the detriment of blacks in not having this connection, using the analogy of Alice in Wonderland:

The character that was a bully wiped away her path behind her. She was like ‘oh I guess the only place I can go is the front. But since I don’t know how far I’ve come, I don’t know if I should keep going or if I’m there.’ So he ended up wiping away the path in front of her and now she doesn’t know what to do. She’s just standing in a little square.

Amira attributed the influence that rappers have over black youth as an opportunity to spread awareness through their lyrics. She perceived that many rap artists attributed their success to themselves, failing to tie their achievements to the black community that helped them.

### **Perceptions of Elitism vs. Collectivism**

Comparisons that participants made of the activism of the past and present led to discussions of the perception of black leaders. Discourse was not on the perceptions that the dominant group had of their efforts but on the opinions held within the black community. Bruce brought into play the concept of elitism, recognizing that black

individuals around him constantly made judgments on which neighborhoods other black students were from or the length of their hair. This engagement in an air of selectivity furthered community divide. Interestingly, even Angela in her connectivity within the national activist community acknowledged that as intellectuals their circle of influence was surrounded by a perception of superiority:

I was talking about this elitism in what it even means to be an activist – does that mean that we’re gonna save you? When we’re with you. We’re not trying to save anyone; we’re saving ourselves because we’re in struggle with you.

Within this focus on leadership within their personal spaces, participants began to problematize the misrepresentation of individualism.

Bruce in the ideal of leadership mentioned the Talented Tenth, a concept endorsed by W.E.B. DuBois in the need for college educated leaders to lift the black masses (Allen, 1998). Bruce saw the need for individuals in positions of power to be exceptional to break stereotypes and pave the way for others. Other participants documented the juxtaposed position of elitism that could be construed from leaders’ efforts. Angela mentioned the Talented Tenth as well as she recognized individualism as black leaders’ aim to achieve power and prestige. Through recent reflections she challenged the narrative that individualism was a recent occurrence in the black community. Angela traced the concept past desegregation efforts in the fight for equality, even back to the division between slaves working in the fields and those chosen to work in the slavemaster’s house. In sharing this reflection as a huge realization in her life, Angela stated, “That’s a natural instinct to want to be in a space where there’s

power and where you're not being oppressed or murdered...I'm an individual, I'm no longer part of the community." Angela's realization was expressed more so in a larger societal context, which would ultimately affect her perception of the immediate context of the black student community.

Greg described the black community as more individualistic in that those who achieve success often break ties with the regular individuals who represent the community. He connected this ideal of separation to Unity in problematizing the narrative that a black student leader infiltrating a mainstream organization broke down stereotypes and created paths for future black leaders. Greg recognized that an exceptional black student leader could be seen to those in power as an exception to the rule, creating greater separation between the individual and the community they sought to represent. Bruce made an analogous statement to illustrate his understanding of black leadership as a cyclical process: "Are you going to say the player who hustled the most is an exception, or are you going to say he's a representation of his coaching staff or team?" Similarly, Dennis viewed his position as an opportunity to shed a positive light on the black campus community; he threaded a sense of responsibility back to one's group membership as a lasting impression on student involvement.

### **The Burden of Representation**

Private regard revealed not only individuals' feelings toward African Americans collectively but also how they felt personally about being an African American. Each of my participants expressed pride in black membership, referring back to the centrality of race in which they saw their black identity as a filter through which they celebrated their

accomplishments in the midst of a predominantly white space. Amira referred to black advancements in society that individuals often do not get credit for, a phenomenon that in many ways generally created a spirit of humbleness in their own accomplishments. They expressed the underground perspective of racial regard which elicits that a thorough knowledge of stigmas surrounding the black image aids in avoiding the internalization of those negative images. Greg articulated that he enjoyed breaking stereotypes held by others, in that he was certain that through those interactions he would prove that he was nothing like what those individuals expected. Bruce again tied his satisfaction with black identity through his representation as the only black individual among others in dominantly white spaces: “It gives me the opportunity to show not only who I am, but where I come from. It’s very refreshing to see that people had no idea we are capable of so many things.” In his worldview, individual accomplishments and connectivity to positive black images were one in the same.

Reflections on private regard also represented the burden of representation some participants felt as student leaders. Dennis recalled major events on campus during which he often looked up at the huge crowds and was amazed that he had such an impactful opportunity to represent black students. This was a responsibility that his fellow white Tradition Holders did not carry on their shoulders in representing the entire population of white students at Unity. And although participants resoundingly disagreed with the construct “I often regret that I am black,” they made connections to the influence of black stigmas that black students must constantly battle. Amira pointed out that while she would not utilize the word regret, her outlook on black behaviors

sometimes existed on a spectrum between shame and disappointment. A constant cognizance of a racialized space was evident in the fact that Ron as a black student in certain situations wondered if those instances would have happened if he were of another race. Yet in times such as being elected as a student government representative or earning a coveted campus award, he chose to embrace those personal accomplishments as a sign of defeating the odds against him. With black pride came the supplementary cognizance of a substandard existence in the eyes of others; the distinction was in the reaction individuals chose in dealing with that reality.

While they agreed with broad regard constructs such as “I feel good about being black,” participants expressed instances in which they were also met with the adverse outcomes of connectivity. In personal reflections of the meaning of positive black identity, Ron listed ideals such as education and striving for excellence that he wished to see more of from the black community. Dennis expressed feelings of discomfort when black people carried out behaviors that could be interpreted as destructive. As previously stated, he realized that although white students participated in those same behaviors, behaviors of one black individual were associated with all black individuals. Angela in her love for black people recognized an inner battle in removing oneself from stigmas and general perceptions of black people while simultaneously accepting that an individual within a particular moment who is fulfilling a negative stereotype is still a black brother or sister. She shared her conversation with other activists to illustrate this concept:

We were talking about community and what does it mean to be black— not what does it mean to be black but what does your black mean to you... if you consider yourself part of the community, then every black is your black! That guy who's walking around with his pants literally to his knees – that's your black.

Her statement exemplifies the inner turmoil black individuals are often engaged in identifying with the variance of negative as well as positive behaviors as part of a collective community, almost alluding to a sense of wholeness that this act creates.

The reality of existence as a black leader who strived for excellence was equipped with a sense of turmoil in staying connected with the black community while simultaneously removing oneself from stigma. Greg spoke of instances during which he found himself questioning the negative actions of other black individuals: "I'm no better— I'm not supposed to judge. I realize I should correct myself and focus on myself as far as my goals, rather than trying to referee other people." Bruce described this act as a state of constant awareness in that people face persistent judgment when in public; he was therefore mindful that one's actions did not just affect one's personal impression on others but also influenced the entire group. This cognizance required him to persistently engage in self-reflection regarding the tendency to judge others. As he witnessed his own maturity and growth, he was often reminded that individuals in their own developmental process did not acknowledge this connectivity of individual actions.

The reality of black students having a separate experience from the mainstream Bonder experience caused participants to challenge the university's diversity rhetoric. Greg cited Unity's attempts to spotlight the increasingly diverse demographics of the

university, when in actuality a sense of diversity was being claimed that had not been reached. Because black student leaders in mainstream organizations were few, they were often called upon for publicity opportunities, a practice that Amira saw friends deal with as they were used relentlessly by the university to send an inclusion message. She articulated that attempts to recruit students of color were meaningless without internal changes in the affirmation of black student leaders as tokens, which ultimately discouraged the larger black student community from greater involvement. She relayed, “If you keep bringing all these diverse people in, but they’re not doing anything to make A & M look more diverse— like actually diverse— then there’s no point of bringing them in.”

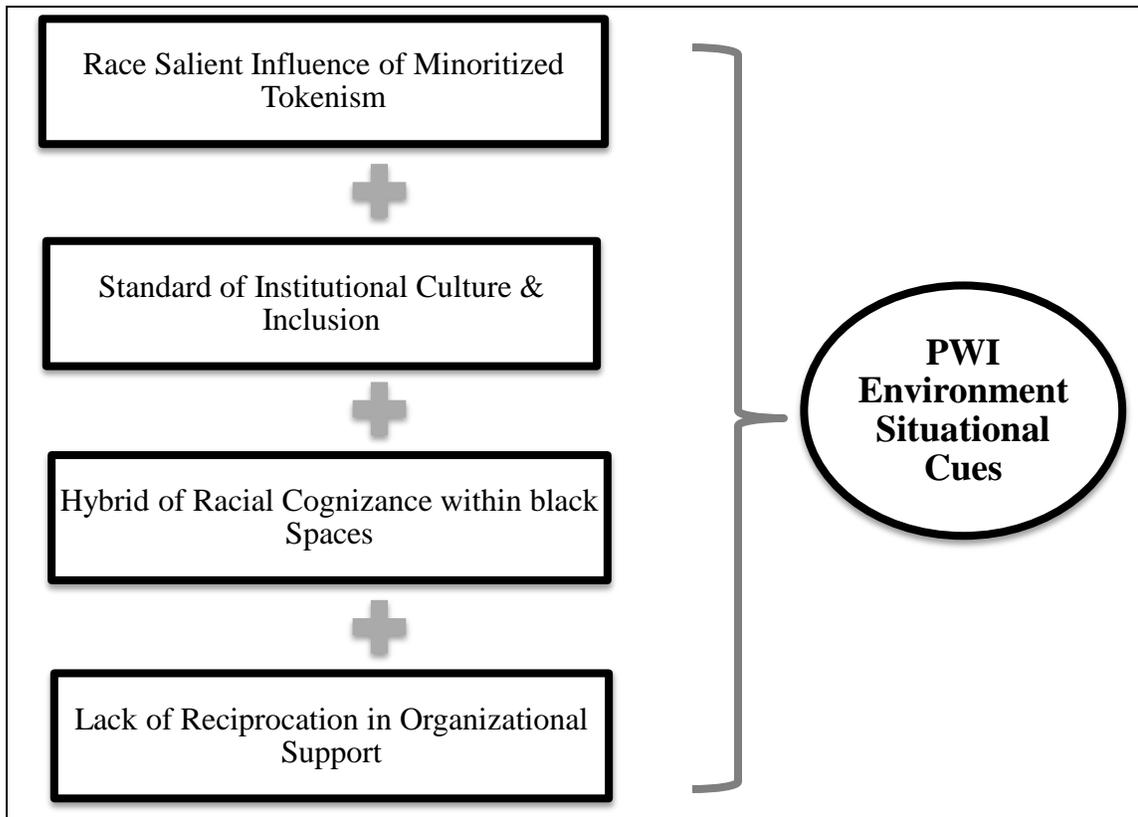
This false sense of inclusion led Bruce to interrogate his actions to ensure that he was tying his successes and leadership back to the black student community. Bruce recently was highlighted in a marketing ad and clearly narrated his thought process in the message being sent to prospective black students:

They have a picture of me and a quote saying— ‘I did this, you can too.’ I thought long and hard— I wanted to make sure that credit went to the right place. I’ve basically been the diversity poster child for Unity. It got to the point where I was like— am I doing this in the right way? Am I being honest with what I’m doing and conveying things they want, or am I doing what needs to be done and what I choose to feel...Students are going to look at this and wonder— what’s it about. They’re gonna want to know how it’s done. It’s my job to tell them— it wasn’t easy, but it’s very possible.

In personal reflections of his leadership, Bruce was persistently deliberate that in his representation he was selling the “truth” of the challenges and differences of Unity life for black students. In this cognizance he also recognized that some black students due to various barriers may be prevented from fulfilling opportunities available to them.

### **Racial Salience**

The MMRI is conceptualized as an interaction of the stable and situational components of racial identity, making it essential that observations within the physical spaces on campus be made. In Shelton and Sellers’ (2000) experimental sessions, they studied variability across race-salient and race-ambiguous situations and found that behavior is somewhat consistent across situations as well as influenced by situational context. They utilized the MMRI hypothesis that some situations are so racially charged that the particular event would necessitate all African Americans to interpret the event based on race. On the other hand, events in which race is ambiguous might cause each individual to pay attention to other cues based on the centrality of race to his or her core identity. The goal of field observations during visits at Unity was to attend university events and participants’ organizational meetings in order to understand how their stable beliefs on race were realized through their various campus interactions. Observations revealed how participants interpreted various situational cues in the PWI environment (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Racial Salience in the PWI Environment**

### **Race Salient Influence of Minoritized Tokenism**

Evidence of racial salience expected to be most prevalent was participation in spaces in which participants were seen as the black representative or token among the majority. Although organizational meetings within mainstream organizations were ideal in observing their behaviors in those spaces, I was cautious about my presence not only in protecting their anonymity but also in the effect that my outsider status would have in those spaces. A unique opportunity arose during the participant selection process in which I spoke with student affairs administrators regarding the purpose of my study.

The university commander of the ROTC suggested that I participate in an overnight recruitment program designed for prospective students to gain insight into the inner workings of the ROTC program and to better determine their fit moving forward. I was engaged with approximately 50 high school students as they received campus tours, interacted with ROTC members, and were given the history of university traditions. The tour affirmed how deeply connected the ROTC program was to the traditions of the university centered on a white racial frame. Freshmen were socialized into internalizing those traditions, having to memorize many of the plaques of university statues and historical facts. Participants had previously informed me that many revered figures on campus were rumored to have Klu Klux Klan ties. This brought up the theoretical question—where are you left as a minoritized student in that accepting values as part of organizational culture you are also in conflict of those values?

Two particular incidents during this observation stood out in relation to racial salience. As we were watching a daily drill routine, Dennis happened to be walking by the squadrons and stopped to say hello and ask how my immersion experience was going. When Dennis walked away, one of the sophomore ROTC members actually running the recruit program asked me in awe, “You know a Traditions Holder?” The admiration and respect that Dennis held in such a coveted position was extremely evident. Later that evening, I was introduced to two ROTC members of color, one female being Korean and one male of Muslim decent. The female was more general regarding being embraced as part of a family-oriented unit, but the male was more candid about the salience of his race. He recognized that because a lot of Bonders had

not been exposed to Muslims, he could be a group representative to educate and break down stereotypes. His intent was that those ROTC members would then go into the larger campus community with a different perspective of other Muslim students they encountered. I directly linked these insights to Dennis' descriptions of legitimacy. As such a highly visible black representative, he sought to create a positive black image through his acceptance and also to build avenues for future black student leaders. Observation data confirmed that within such a traditional affiliation such as ROTC, Amira and Dennis found unconditional acceptance under such a regimented program. But at the same time, the close-knit encounters they experienced within that setting also created a racially salient awareness which they applied in other areas of involvement.

Ron's weekly student government meetings provided another illustration of the patterns of tokenism present in predominantly white campus spaces. Ron was the only black individual along with several Hispanic and Asian students; throughout our discourse he spoke of the ignorance of some of the younger representatives entrenched in political agendas and causing controversy. During my initial visits in the open meetings as a visitor, I built a description of many of the vocal representatives as conservative, close-minded, and dualistic in their worldview. In the course of one particular meeting, a group of representatives introduced a proposal which suggested that the multicultural center be required to host educational events on state culture. Their premise was that international students could benefit from cultural awareness and learning about "the great land they're living in." Two Hispanic representatives immediately took up the role of educator and were engaged in a debate challenging the

proposal. They stated that not only was the authors' definition of culture inappropriate, but that knowing the multicultural center's mission and budget that this proposal was not properly aligned. This proposal exemplified how the legitimacy of a service created for students of color often is interrogated if not affiliated with the interests of the dominant white student body. While Ron did not make any commentary during the meeting, afterwards he mentioned that he was highly offended by numerous ignorant comments made. Within that highly race salient space as the only black student, he was inclined to perceive actions as racist.

### **Standard of Institutional Culture and Inclusion**

Certain events within the campus environment reflected racial ideology discourse regarding how blacks in America have affected popular culture. One particular annual event centered on collaboration between NPHC Greeks and IFC/Panhellenic Greeks organizations, those sororities and fraternities with majority white members. The result was a campus tradition in which each NPHC organization partnered with a dominant Greek group to teach the latter group chants and stepping, an NPHC custom deeply rooted in African dance and expression. The event produced a packed audience and although the majority of attendees were white, there was a significant amount of black students in attendance to support the black Greek community. In this space the salient factor might not be interpreted as racial but yet Greek or non-Greek status. Because the dominant groups were the main feature of the show, I noted that black campus culture was situationally accepted and popular as legitimized by the white Greek community. Bruce later confirmed that NPHC Greek shows were barely received and attended by the

dominant group in and of themselves. This aspect of legitimacy and awareness of indifference for black events possibly could generate negative attitudes toward the dominant group. However, within that moment, Bruce and Amira as NPHC members displayed an overwhelming pride in that their organizations were being highlighted.

In the above example, an individual's beliefs regarding how blacks should interact with the larger society would have influence on how that event was interpreted. This racial cognizance is relevant for the larger macrosystem of Bonder traditions which African Americans chose to embrace or reject, creating either a racially ambiguous or salient moment. Dennis invited me to an event held multiple times throughout the semester, during which the Traditions Holders led crowds of up to 10,000 individuals in university rituals designed to facilitate pride. The particular event I attended had approximately 500 people in the crowd, and besides the black athletes in attendance I only observed a handful of students of color. Within that moment for me race was evident, being that I could not join the other students as a part of a community that embraced that historical university knowledge. However, within that scenario a black student such as Amira who embraces traditions would not feel excluded, being that the strength of her identity as a Unity Bonder was more salient during that moment than race. In those moments connectivity to the institutional culture was exceedingly dominant; therefore black students who accept those traditions could interpret situational salience based on other stimuli.

## **Hybrid of Racial Cognizance within Black Spaces**

The assumption might be made that interactions within racially-based organizations created race ambiguous situations. However, moments in which individuals were immersed in a dominantly black space, although not centered on racial cognizance, were still defined by racial ideals. Students did not have race at the forefront of interpretation due the creation of comfort within that moment as well as a sense of freedom in not being minoritized. Angela invited me to a meeting of the Coalition of black Students (CBS) during which I observed a professional atmosphere as well as a family oriented vibe. In her reflection journal she spoke at length of the fearlessness she saw in her staff and had also mentioned the scrutiny of her organization that required an atmosphere of excellence in their programming. During the meeting it was apparent that Angela had shaped an environment of challenge and support, and the goals of the CBS were to shed a positive light on black ideals and culture through well-planned, educational programs. Noticeable throughout the meeting was the comfort held by the staff in feeling free to engage in self-explanatory behaviors that were well known in the black community, such as a male raising a black fist in approval or several members showing support through the use of snaps so often used in black poetry circles.

As the researcher, within those black spaces I sensed a feeling of comfort which exemplified the reason that the majority of black students solely sought membership in black student organizations. In my reflexive journal ethnographic data I wrote, “There was no effort that had to be made for understandings to inside knowledge of our culture. You just couldn’t do those things in mainstream organizations.” During black

organizational meetings, members shared a tacit understanding of black values and culture which could be freely expressed within a safe space. These symbols of culture would not be present in dominant organizational spaces unless they were accompanied with a scrutinized explanation or an educational moment. I felt a stark contrast of ease at these meetings in comparison to the mainstream organizational meetings, during which even I stood out as one of the few faces of color in the room.

Over the course of the study through our reciprocal dialogue, I gained understanding that Angela's strong sense of racial centrality, activism, and racial pride allowed her to react somewhat consistently across situations within the campus environment. But she also understood that within the organizational structure of Unity that code switching, a variance in language and demeanor based on the receiving audience, was an essential and appropriate skill in interacting with the dominant group. Just as their white counterparts were afforded a sense of privilege in being able to behave in spaces without a cognizance of race, within spaces made up of predominantly black members participants and their black peers were afforded that sanctity as well.

Even within black spaces the influence of institutional culture was evident. Bonders have rituals and expressions utilized in voicing their approval; I became familiar with these expressions as I attended student government meetings, the ROTC recruiting program, and traditional campus events. I attended a meeting for the African American Southern Student Conference of which Greg is an executive leader, and they utilized the same Bonder expression to verbalize their sense of approval during the meeting as well. The African American student affairs advisor even incorporated these

dominant group behaviors to form a sense of community. Because institutional culture was built on a strong sense of communal ties to traditions, there were certain aspects that were deeply embedded into every facet of campus life, across black as well as white spaces. This finding gives evidence of the influence of the sociological environment and, just as the MMRI authors hypothesize, suggests that with a comprehensive picture of racial identity that individuals' behavior can be somewhat predicted across situations.

### **Lack of Reciprocation in Organizational Support**

As formerly stated, I was cautious of my decisions to observe within certain organizational settings in which my presence might cause discomfort or threaten the anonymity of my participants. Bruce was involved in a university-wide diversity committee which I showed interest in attending, as he had mentioned several upcoming events to highlight inclusion and diversity at Unity. He checked with the student affairs administrators overseeing the committee and was told that many of the committee members preferred that the meetings remained closed in order to be candid in their discussions and planning. As a researcher I would assume that a diversity committee with a demographically diverse gathering of members would not be controversial. However, the administrator also disclosed that several inquiries had been made by outsiders requesting to sit in on a meeting; in this sense I understood the way in which Bruce described diversity as a publicity moment. Instead Bruce invited me to the opening event which featured a well-known African American speaker. The majority of the audience was students and faculty members of color as well as local high school students. The same theatre, which was packed for the Greek event previously

mentioned, would have had dismal attendance if it had not been for the high school attendees.

Bruce expressed disappointment and admitted that he could not help but be offended by the blatant disinterest displayed by the dominant student population. Because white speakers from that same profession had previously been received with noticeable support, he had little choice but to interpret this variance of interest as disregard for racial awareness. Related to involvement in campus life, black students were constantly aware of the dominant group's interests and perspectives, as the majority of events centered on those ideals. At the same time, they functioned under the realization that the same level of interest and acknowledgment was not reciprocated when activities of cultural value were often deemed as "other" by the dominant group or received minimal support. This opposition supported the sense of double consciousness participants spoke of, and Bruce adamantly declared that his cognizance made him more relentless in his pursuit of excellence to represent the black community.

### **Interaction of Dimensions**

The MMRI posits the concept of racial identity as a snapshot of status at a particular point in time rather than an explanation of an individual's sequential developmental through a set of stages. Through participation in this study, students were able to provide a narrative of their position within their various microsystems of involvement at Unity all the way up to the large-scale connection with the social construction of the black group. Interaction between the four dimensions of the MMRI was evident in how participants constructed their racial identity as multifaceted and

constantly influenced by the social construction of interactions around them. The MMRI theoretically supports the ideal of predicting one's behavior based on the situational and stable components of one's racial attitudes. At the level of a specific event, the authors of the MMRI outline a process through which stable beliefs interact with situational cues, causing an individual to interpret the extent of which race is salient in that particular context. The individual then appraises the situation and determines the appropriate response or behavior within that specific context (Sellers et al., 1998). Because the current study through qualitative methodology allowed participants to provide descriptive data in regard to the construct items, the interaction of MMRI dimensions was given meaning by outlining the process that brings students to interpret situations in specific ways. In this case, the process of interactions between dimensions which was revealed through participant discourse was more important than the outcome.

Evidenced in the current study is a strong relationship between racial centrality and racial ideology, as individuals' awareness of black identity had a resonant influence on the ways that they chose to interact with others within the campus environment through student organizations. In the findings on centrality this dimension was described as the filter of students' personal identities, and this indeed was true for the other stable beliefs of racial identity. The central relationship of race in how students identified as black had an intricate part in how students interpreted their interactions and how others saw them, revealed in the ideology and regard themes. However, this study more importantly highlighted what has not previously been captured with use of the

MIBI to operationalize multidimensional racial identity: the role of context in individuals' immediate environment.

Racial identity could not be separated and understood independently of the PWI context, because students were in a constant state of negotiation based on the various norms, reference groups, and situational cues that required them to be aware of their existence as a minoritized student. This awareness was even evident in the internal analysis of dimensions. For example, within racial regard there was a definite emphasis on students' private regard beliefs in how they felt about black group membership in comparison to public regard and how others felt about blacks. Utilizing the role of context across themes, students' cognizance of the racialized spaces of Unity caused them to focus more on what institutional culture meant for them personally in their endeavors to maintain positive black identity rather than to focus on what others felt about them. The PWI environment produced linkages between certain dimensions and subscales. Centrality, the nationalist ideology subscale, and private regard were highly associated. Because students took pride in black membership because of their ability to excel as student leaders in a white institutional space, they had strong preferences in all three of those areas to a strong black identity. Negative cues from the PWI environment which confirmed whiteness and white institutional space made it all the more important for students to find connectivity with the black student community to counter those cues.

The PWI environment revealed its influence within other dimensions as well. The dominant definitions of engagement ideology theme revealed that students who embrace university traditions and mainstream involvement are more able to relate to an

assimilationist or humanist ideology; however all of the other themes in this area showed a negative influence on an assimilationist or humanist ideology. Individualism versus ascribed identity, impact of white institutional space, and building trust all relate to the ever present cognizance of group stigmas and systemic racism in the institutional environment which would negatively affect one's ability to relate to the dominant group. This is extremely important in the understanding that individuals can simultaneously hold two conflicting ideologies. Black student leaders in mainstream organizations maintained the influence of university traditions in creating new avenues for involvement. But at the same time, the cognizance of white institutional presence positively affirmed an inclination toward nationalist ideology, allowing them to stay connected to black group membership within their campus involvements. Students displayed resilience in successfully maneuvering through sometimes conflicting influences and ideologies.

## **Conclusion**

As the study came to an end participants expressed the realization of the positive impact their participation had in the realization of their racial beliefs. Amira at the end of our last interview emphasized that our extensive discussions allowed her to engage in self-reflection, stating, "Why didn't I go do this and make these different strides, if that's what I was thinking? And then I realized, I didn't realize I was thinking that." Involvement in this research allowed students to engage in a critical assessment not only of their racial beliefs but the institutional racial climate as well. There was an overwhelming sentiment of the lack of opportunities to talk through their racial

cognizance, and participants recognized that the study allowed them to be more intentional in their endeavors. Bruce expressed that his consciousness that emerged from the study was something he hoped to continue, asserting, “Because you’re doing this [study], it can exist and we can actually do this ourselves.” The transformative ways that they desired to carry their racial knowledge into their future endeavors stood as a powerful testament to how qualitative research can affect practice. If these insightful student leaders felt empowered through the study, how might such a process of reflection benefit a leadership program, or practicum course, or organizational assessment?

Angela verbalized further realization through the study of how problematic surveys are in the boundaries that they create, conveying that black students are often silenced through surveys or other institutional methods. Throughout our study as I presented the survey items, students would at times respond with, “oh if I was filling in the survey, I guess I’d say about a 3” or “I’d have to say strongly agree.” Because this study challenged students to dig further into their attitudes to place meaning behind survey items, they were fully able to portray their experiential knowledge and directly relate their understandings to practices and policy that they experienced daily in the campus community. Students thanked me for inclusion in the study which allowed for the authenticity of their voices, and I realized just how our reciprocal relationship of qualitative inquiry had come full circle. Qualitative methodology allowed us to deconstruct the survey items used to operationalize the MMRI while still affirming the complexity of racial identity for African American students. The process of reflexivity,

discourse, and appreciation of context that was built through this study transformed understandings of multidimensional racial identity to implications for higher education beyond a diversity rhetoric.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

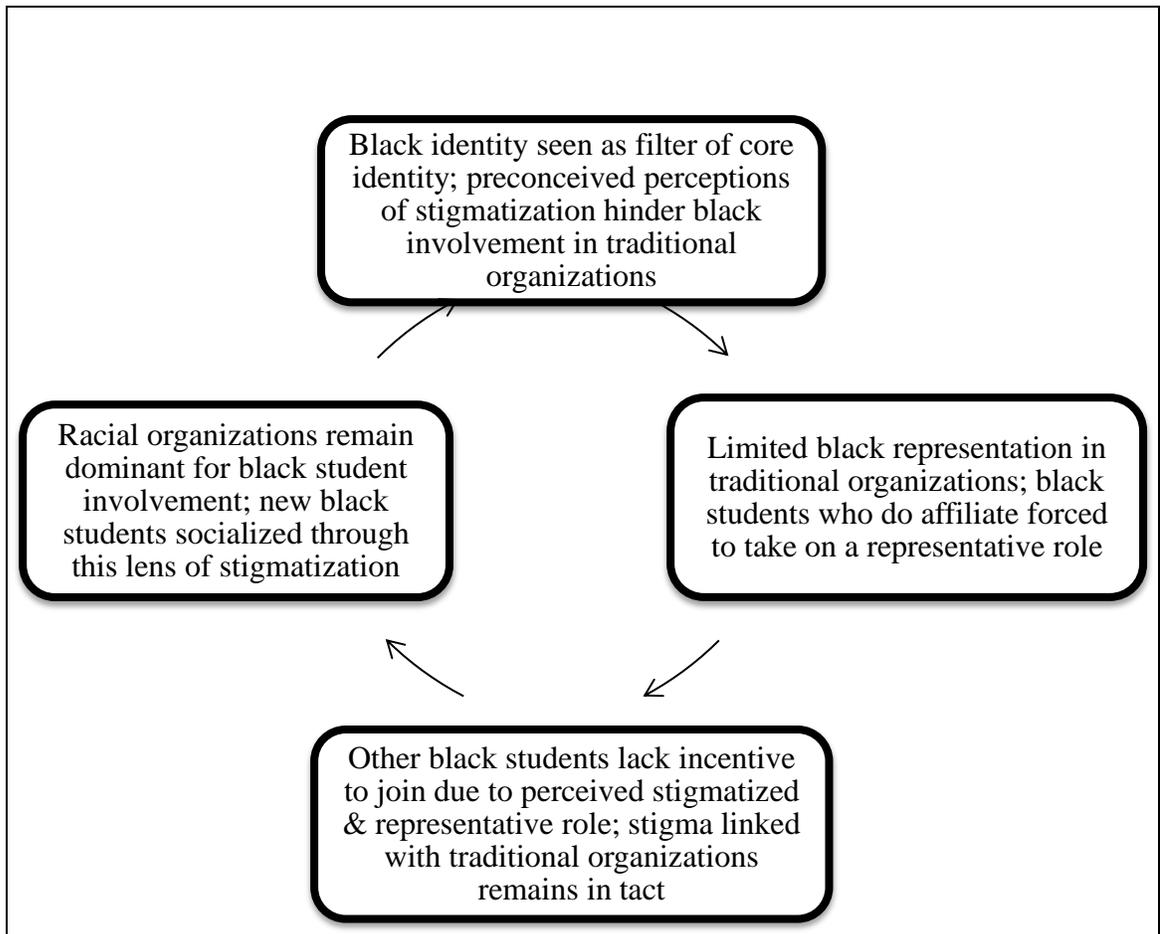
The previous chapter outlined findings related to the four dimensions of the MMRI based on a qualitative approach which captured student's in-depth responses to MIBI construct items. Theories reflect the culture of the particular moment in time in which they were created (McEwen, 2005), and the constructivist approach of this current study allowed for additional probing and meaningful discourse to further explore the MMRI to reflect the influence of the sociological environment. This chapter will provide a discussion of the MMRI dimensions and the implications that the findings have for higher education practice and future research. The dimensions of racial centrality, ideology, regard, and salience all have independent implications for higher education, but the ways in which they complement and inform one another also provide a comprehensive picture of African American racial identity. Qualitative methodology combined with the MMRI gave a detailed depiction of the influence of the PWI institutional norms and various reference groups formed within the campus environment.

#### **Racial Centrality**

As discussed in the racial centrality findings, students were able to express an awareness and appreciation for their personal black identity separate from the negative stereotype of black group membership. I utilize Angela's reflection of black personal identity as a process of constant development to sum up this ideal: "Something that I say

all the time is that I'm an evolution which is in itself a revolution. Because the most powerful thing about my transformation is that I don't think I ever lost myself... I gained so much." Students experienced the forming of identities and reactions to the environment as an ongoing social development

Because students mainly existed within the macrosystem of peer culture at Unity, they chose to express their black identity in activities to make meaning of the immediate environment rather than the larger macrosystem of society. By engaging in critical discourse created through qualitative methodology, students were able to be reflective as well as diagnostic of perceived barriers to variability in black student involvement. Figure 8 outlines the cyclical outcomes of the effect of an institutional culture based on whiteness and racial stereotypes which brings race to the forefront of student organizational involvement.



**Figure 8. Cyclical Outcomes of Centrality on PWI Black Student Involvement**

At the onset of the study students were selected based on their primary organizational affiliation, but I realized that through the course of their collegiate career, with the exception of Angela, students had involved themselves in black as well as mainstream organizations. The norms of black student involvement did not hinder these students from pursuing an extensive list of experiences that Bonder traditions had to offer them. They described the centrality of causes important to affirming black cultural identity as

the attraction of the majority of black students to black organizations, but at the same time prescribed this as a hindrance to greater presence in leadership roles across campus.

Several implications emerged from student's delineation between their black identity and ties to black group membership. Out of this complexity of racial centrality comes the need for higher education professionals to view the black student community as heterogeneous. Students' feedback on barriers to group connectivity situates this study as an addition to previous research that calls for not only the study of outgroup stigmas but a greater focus on ingroup differences that affect communication within black student subcommunities as well (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Gusa, 2010; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Solorzano et al., 2000). While participants desired to exemplify excellence as a black representative, they did not want to be seen as a diversity quota in terms of their representation being used by the dominant group as a false sense of inclusion or viewed as token status to their black peers. Understanding this qualitative connotation of black representation is essential to discourse necessitated not only across groups but within groups to challenge misconceptions which hinder collectivism and positive group affiliation.

Another implication of racial centrality based on this applied qualitative methodology is the consideration of the effect of institutional titles in creating racial silencing. Through the process of securing my sample at Unity, several student affairs and university members described the sense of racial silencing in the subject of race as taboo in discussions across campus culture. This silencing was made evident through participants' discussion of the term *Bonder* being so central to their collegiate

experience. While giving all students a university title under the pretense of acceptance regardless of race builds a façade of inclusion, it also took on the discriminatory traits of a colorblind philosophy (Rains, 1988). This benign response of “not seeing color” which institutional members often evoke “denies persons of color their right to have their own identities as well as the values, histories, contributions, language and richness of such identities” (p. 93). As a former English as a second language K-12 educator, I frequently heard white teachers attest that they did not see color in their students; this one-dimensional epistemological lens makes no account for the cultural differences that require acknowledgment of each student’s needs. This white framing is just as methodologically inappropriate in the cultural context of a PWI.

Based on the findings of this study, PWI’s can function with deeply embedded traditions based on white ideologies and culture but yet divert system inequalities by placing significant emphasis on unifying students through a university title. Moore and Bell (2011) highlight how tactics used by those in power can create the appearance of progressive racial change but in fact work to stall racial progress through the creation of boundaries and limitations. This is the effect of a colorblind title such as Bonder: this title created a false sense of inclusion that students would be embraced, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, therefore working to silence students and making any outcries of racism and attempts to fight inequalities at Unity sound irrational and unnecessary. University titles have the ability of creating an ideology of power, as explicated by Bonilla-Silva:

Ideologies of the powerful are central in the production and reinforcement of the status quo... Whereas rulers receive solace by believing they are not involved in the terrible ordeal of creating and maintaining inequality, the ruled are charmed by the almost magic qualities of a hegemonic ideology. (2014, p. 74)

Participants in the study recognized the existence of this underlying ideology although they embraced the title of Bonder. Inequalities at PWIs can be misrepresented and ignored by administration as they put increasing emphasis on creating an illusion of inclusion.

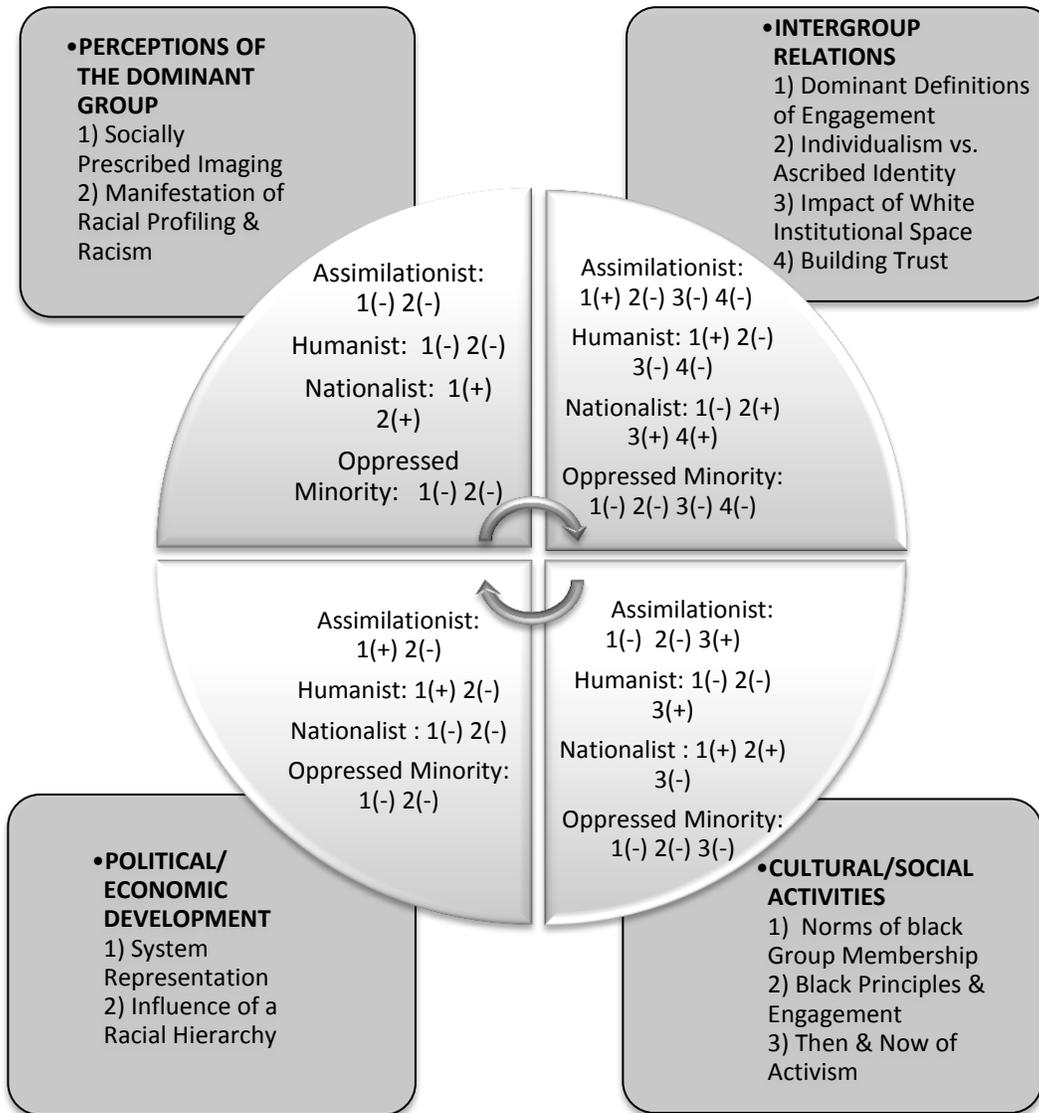
In their cognizance of race within a white institutional space, students were aware that black group stigmas were transmitted through the socialization of new black students but rarely addressed by those in power. If increased inclusion of a demographically diverse student body is truly the goal of institutional administrators, then the racial realities known among subgroups should be encompassed in dialogue directly stemming from central leadership. Identity development issues should not be solely limited to a multicultural center or designated campus diversity program, although those exist as safe spaces for students of color in addressing the centrality of race in their experiences. Gusa (2010) voices the effect of an influence of white institutional presence in stating, "The problem within higher education is not differing worldviews or ideologies, but rather, the domination of one over others" (p. 469). Recognition of race and racism viewed in isolation from the dominant focus of campus concerns affirms separation along racial lines and asserts an ideal that black students belong in racially-based organizations.

The MMRI rejects the notion of previous black identity models based on the placement of centrality of race as fundamental to African American identity; this approach formerly situated a low centrality on race among other personal identities as an indicator of negative mental health. Findings from this study gave qualitative evidence of some similarities to African centered personality models while still emphasizing that cultural pride can be manifested in a variety of forms. Kambon (1992) describes black personality as an intrinsic and innate phenomenon while at the same time rooted in the social-collective context of environmental interactions; these two pieces cannot be understood in isolation but rather analyzed in the context of a sense of wholeness. This description fits well with participants' portrayal of personal black identity as intrinsic to their core identities, but they also held a constant awareness of collective black group orientation. As highlighted in the current study, although certain ideals of connectivity might be relevant in the study of black personality, these traits should not be imposed upon individuals. Rather, they should be utilized to guide discussions on ideals such as group variability and the heterogeneity of black identity which continue to evolve and encompass a wide range of attitudes and behaviors.

### **Racial Ideology**

Because the racial ideology dimension of the MMRI is constructed through the use of four subscales, there was an abundance of findings regarding students' attitudes in regard to how one should interact with society. This dimension alone consisted of half of the interviews and provided significant insight into the ways in which students realized their beliefs about the importance of race in their lives in the immediate PWI

environment. Due to a constructivist approach, the goal was not in producing statistical data to support students' disposition toward one subscale over others; the purpose of ideology analysis lied more in determining how findings within the four theme areas (perceptions of the dominant group, intergroup relations, political/economic development, and cultural/social activities) negatively or positively influenced a connection with each particular ideology. In order to outline implications for this dimension, I first utilize an ideology matrix here to describe the interplay of themes outlined in chapter four as related to the assimilationist, humanist, nationalist, and oppressed minority ideologies (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9. Ideology Matrix**

It is important to note that the largest influence on ideology occurred within intergroup relations, the area under which four themes emerged in the previous chapter. In relation to the matrix this should not be seen as an imbalance but instead makes sense in that the study is situated in the PWI context; within this immediate space students were engaged with the constant presence of a dominant worldview. The above matrix is environment specific in that the themes surrounding the ideologies represent contextual responses that individuals within that setting might elicit. Another distinction in the use of this matrix lies in the fact that these influences mirror the consensus of individuals in the study as student leaders. Participants acknowledged that under the constraints of community norms that the majority of black students did not necessarily embrace mainstream involvement. Therefore, the matrix should be employed as a blueprint to be applied within the context of a particular group being studied as well as with a thorough understanding of the specific environment in which that group functions.

Supporting the theoretical framing of the MMRI, assimilationist and humanist ideology themes were highly connected. Participants recognized the difference in racial attitudes witnessed in their visits outside of the United States. However, in the particular context of the dominance of a white racial frame on American culture and within their immediate environments, they interpreted the white American viewpoint and a humanist perspective as one in the same. Within the PWI environment there were certain instances that encouraged participants to embrace institutional traditions and see themselves more connected to the general student body. As revealed in the previous

chapter, the intergroup relations area revealed the positive as well as negative influence of institutional norms on racial ideology.

The ideology matrix can also aid in providing greater understanding of how various collegiate environments affect racial attitudes. Previous studies have highlighted the role that HBCUs have in producing a greater sense of African self-consciousness and an inclination toward a nationalist ideology for those students in comparison to their PWI black counterparts (Cokley, 1999). That same study also indicated that black students at PWIs showed a greater inclination toward assimilationist and humanist ideologies, with assumptions made that these ideologies were utilized as a survival strategy or attempt to avoid being seen as militant and shunned within various reference groups. The matrix gives evidence that students of the current study did not use an assimilationist or humanist perspective as a survival method, but in fact as they embraced university traditions they balanced assimilationist connectivity with nationalist ideals to avoid internalization of the negative message embedded in a white institutional space. Authors of the MMRI previously suggested that individuals can simultaneously hold several philosophies, but before this study no qualitative data existed to explain the process of developing multiple ideologies. Use of this matrix emphasizes that ideology should be viewed as the interaction of overlapping and mutually influencing attitudes. Rather than quantitative representation, the focus should remain on the meaning and development of those attitudes.

The matrix also exhibits how the black student community sheltered black students from the influence of a dominant viewpoint which might cause individuals to

internalize an inferiority narrative. A noteworthy area of future study is the influence of the cultural/social activities themes: norms of black group membership, black principles and engagement, and the then and now of activism. The first two themes had a positive influence on the inclination toward a nationalist perspective while the latter showed a negative influence under that same ideology. As discussed in the previous chapter, the false narrative behind the lack of activism for the current generation created disconnect in the black student community. Students revealed a misunderstanding in the definition of Afrocentrism and just what black connectivity should look like in terms of involvement. This area has major implications for the need of greater discourse within campus subgroups. Allen (1998) recognizes that various eras, i.e., radical versus conservative black social movements, create expectations around students' collective commitments and raises the question: "How will the current generation of Black students respond to the contemporary scene" (p. 71)? Community disconnect outlined in this study indicates need for increased discussion on the current era of engagement.

In relation to the oppressed minority ideology, none of the theme areas explicated a positive influence toward this racial attitude for participants. This stands as a major inference for higher education professions who often lump all students of color together under the term minority and assume they hold a common connection. This study gives strong evidence that in the PWI context there exists an either/or dichotomy that forces students to think in terms of black or white. Participants were either immersed in making sense of the dominant worldview which created rules of behavior or negotiating the norms of the black student community which also dictated subgroup expectations.

The only area which I hypothesized might positively influence students to feel more inclination toward the oppressed minority ideology was in the perceptions of the dominant group theme: manifestation of racial profiling and racism. During the national Trayvon Martin coverage I noticed that many other racial groups sympathized with the black American plight and acknowledged the injustice of the Trayvon Martin case. Participant responses however did not represent a reciprocal relationship in that social event creating greater relations with other oppressed groups; instead the event caused even greater awareness of the unique plight of the African American experience.

The findings on racial ideology imply a need for a better understanding of how the organizational structure of a PWI impacts the connectivity felt in various subgroups on campus. Again, the assumption cannot be made by the dominant group that students of color in mainstream organizations feel the same amount of freedom as their white counterparts in being able to express their opinions and advocate for their beliefs. Take into account how Angela confronted the lack of advocacy being taken up by black student leaders in mainstream organizations, when in fact their representation looked very different because of an organizational structure which created rules around their involvement. Her statement seemed almost as a paradox because of the fact that the Coalition of black Students is housed under such a mainstream structure as the student union and could be seen as working within the system, but there is a clear distinction. The president of a black student organization advocating for black issues, whose organization receives support and is distinguished as the minority voice of a mainstream student union structure, is much different than a black president of the actual student

union advocating for black issues. The latter would be a very challenging feat. Organizational structure ultimately affects the impact of black student leadership and the ability of minoritized students to have a true voice, which higher educational professionals must consider when differentiating identity development challenges for various students.

The lack of knowledge students expressed on the oppression of other subgroups represents the need for increased understanding across subcommunities on campus. In expressing their beliefs regarding whether or not coalitions should be formed among oppressed groups, participants named several barriers to such alliances. The broader societal discussion centers on narratives surrounding each group that further separate the effort of oppressed groups as a whole. For instance, activists representing the Hispanic community and immigration reform in the past have made analogies likening immigrants being rounded up at the border to the slavery of blacks in America, with often elicits rage among black community activists. Participants recognized that although comparisons could not be made to such an atrocity as the enslavement of blacks in America, discourse on racism should not be a game of comparisons. Within the study, other minoritized groups on campus such as the Hispanic student community were not considered as allies because of the fact that they often did not view themselves as being oppressed. This intensified cognizance of the black/white dichotomy and created further marginalization for the black student community as the most vocal and stigmatized campus group.

While this study focused on the specific sociocultural perspective of African Americans, it supports the need for future research and provides evidence that a constructivist approach combined with race-specific theories allows for an in-depth look at group heterogeneity and current identity development for students of color. Other subgroups, such as Arab American students, which deal with issues such as language, assimilation, socially constructed negative stigmas, and social positioning of their group within the larger societal context, must be understood in terms of their own racial realities. Even though models of racial or ethnic identity are critiqued for only exploring a single dimension of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000), this study gives evidence that a constructivist approach applied to race-specific theories creates avenues for necessary discourse and gives voice and meaning to students' experiences, rather than a reliance on survey generalizations.

### **Racial Regard**

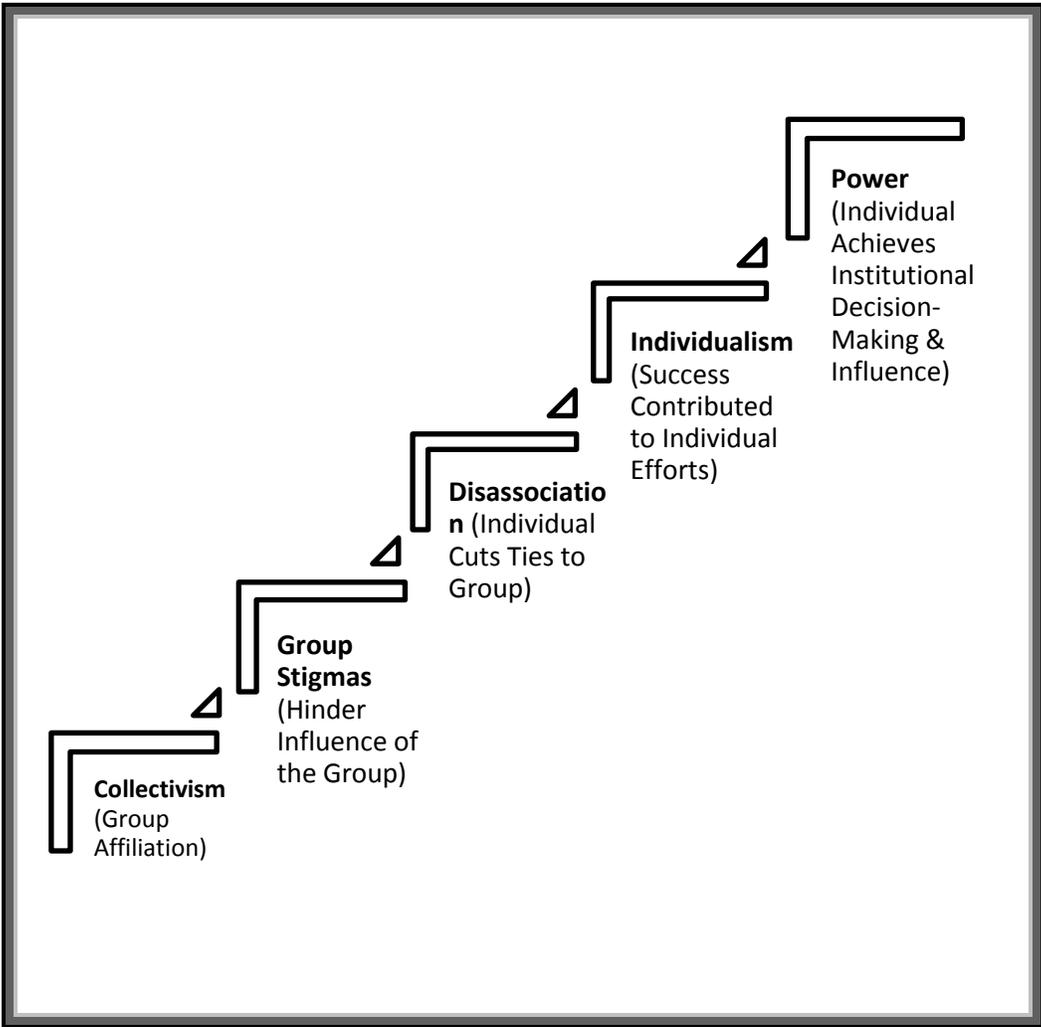
Data analysis in the dimension of racial regard revealed a definite emphasis on participants' reflections on private regard in comparison to public regard. As we moved through survey constructs, students commented on the redundancy of public regard constructs as well as the generic and problematic nature of terminology such as "good" and "respect." The balance students developed in understanding the negative public regard surrounding black group membership while maintaining a positive private regard affirms the underground approach to the interaction of the two regard subscales. Students displayed a firm understanding of the societal construction of black inferiority,

particularly for those who were engaged in social science courses focused on race, and this knowledge acted as a shield from the generic negative imaging of black identity.

Although a comparison of ideology scores between HBCU and PWI students revealed discrepancies due to collegiate environment, Cokley's findings (1999) showed no significant difference in the two groups' public and private regard scores. Even though the PWI environment does not allow total immersion in black activities and values threaded through institutional culture, participants in the cognizance of racial differences within their immediate environment sought out black connectivity to counteract negative stereotypes. Throughout our discourse students rejected the idea that black students had to attend HBCUs to be connected to black culture. Instead they emphasized that attending a PWI better prepared them for the racial realities that they would experience for the remainder of their careers in various heterogeneous settings. In fact, as student leaders immersed in university traditions, their continuous interactions with their white counterparts perhaps allowed them to better distinguish between systemic racism and individual acts. While a comparison of institutional environments on racial attitudes is beyond the scope of this study, the qualitative data provided by participants suggests that interactions within the PWI environment can have a positive effect on black identity.

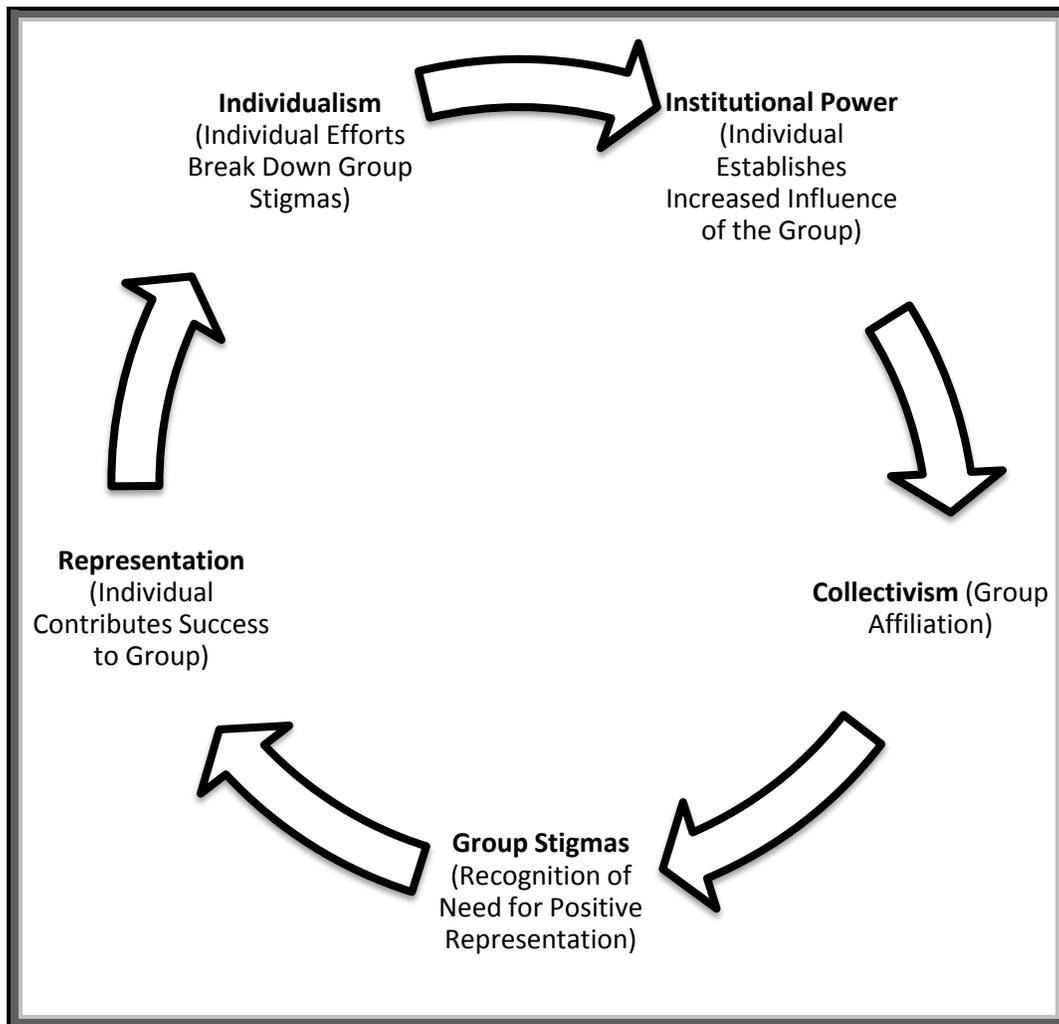
Student leadership in the study produced strong implications regarding how the concept of individualism versus collectivism affects student subgroups and their perceptions of acceptance within the institutional culture. Participants' personal stories of how they challenged themselves as representatives of the black community revealed

the need for greater discourse related to the concept of institutional power. As conceptualized by the study, efforts of the leadership of students of color can be misconstrued by their respective black peers as attempts of disassociation rather than representation. This process of perception is what I deem as the racial institutional power ladder (see Figure 10).



**Figure 10. Racial Institutional Power Ladder**

Individuals through their achievements seek to open greater avenues for their black peers to follow; however, if the message relayed through their actions lacks a sense of connectivity to the black student community, their success rather will be perceived as an exception to the rule. Evident through this study was the fact that representation does not have a particular blueprint, but rather the discourse of this study indicates that representation necessitates communication for students of color. Rather than being perceived as a ladder of separation, individual student leadership should instead be manifested as a cyclical process which I deem as a racial institutional power cycle, in which individualism is clearly linked back to the collective identity of that particular subgroup (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Racial Institutional Power Cycle (Process of Increased Group Influence)**

Black student leaders are often called upon repetitively to represent a sense of diversity and inclusion related to institutional culture and policy. But when the same select group of students is relentlessly utilized rather than accepting the variance of talents and roles in the black student community, opportunities of representation are misconstrued by the subgroup as well as the larger collegiate community. Inclusion of the black perspective in university policy was described in this study as fleeting

moments of inclusion, such as the tendency Bruce described of university-wide committees being created with a diverse membership, but only temporarily and for specific events. While he gladly accepted these opportunities, again, these efforts are often interpreted by students as publicity stunts or fabricated interests on the part of university officials who hold the power. If leadership was instead fashioned as a genuine effort to incorporate various subgroup members as well as a constant engagement of the collective subcommunity, greater group influences might be realized for true changes in institutional culture and policy.

Participants were well aware of the burden of representation they often took on as black student leaders, an identity development issue which is essential for higher education professionals to be cognizant of in terms of working with students of color. Steele (2010), through the theory of stereotype threat, gives evidence that the overwhelming stigmas associated with a group can negatively affect students' performance and behaviors within certain spaces. While his study was centered on academic performance, it also indicated that in attempts to dispel stereotypes, students instead might perform better. Participants exhibited this alternate outcome of stereotype threat in the social realm, as they utilized their excellence in the campus environment as determination in overcoming those threats. This conduct supports the notion that black students often must exude double effort and build extreme resilience in navigating through the general academic and social terrain of college as well as disproving stereotypes.

Emotional labor is a theme which Moore (2008) explores in her study of elite law schools and the ways in which students of color resist white institutional space. Within institutions which are founded on white ideologies and which embrace norms that favor the dominant perspective, students of color are often doubly placed in a paradox of either participating in a so-called race neutral campus culture or disengaging themselves in the experience of campus life and immersing themselves in a fight against injustice.

Participants in my study expressed the various ways that they embraced campus traditions and avoided conflicts based on a constant state of racial awareness, but they also used their involvement in the black student community as an avenue to affirm the value of their cultural identity. An additional facet of emotional labor in the current study was revealed through disconnect of the black student community itself. My participants all found belonging through their various subgroup connections, but different rules of behavior from the black subgroup on what black engagement should look like created additional emotional tasks for students. Understanding of this domain of energy for students of color is essential for higher education professionals seeking to increase black student participation in different areas of campus life.

Another implication for higher education practice is the need for a shift from university rhetoric on an increasingly diverse student body to an increased focus on integrating the student body which already exists. Discourse on diversity has created a watered down mechanism in which racial reform has in actuality been stalled; in other words, the issue of diversity in higher education has evolved into a mechanism to embrace student differences without tackling inequality. As Moore and Bell (2011)

explain, “diversity becomes an embedded component of the color-blindness rhetoric which de-contextualizes race and racial inequality from the structures that create and reproduce this inequality” (p. 600). As related to the centrality and ideology implications of black student involvement, the regard dimension revealed challenges to diversity rhetoric as participants questioned if the university held actual interest in what they preached. When referring to black students in positions of power, students used terms such as “taking one for the team” and “wearing a mask.” Diversity rhetoric as expressed by this study was envisioned as a box to be checked off on a checklist of institutional efforts to create an illusion of inclusion. Several participants often joked with friends that they would end up on posters for diversity, when in fact they did. Even if the university makes minimal strides to bring a more diverse student population, what is the effect if the makeup of its student organizations continues to embody a monolithic profile? Rather than the generic focus on university demographics, the focus of assessment should instead be on student organization demographics; the need for greater inclusion should be seen less as a burden of individual choice for students of color but rather a university course of action in what barriers to involvement exist.

### **Racial Salience**

Previous hypotheses on the variability and consistency of racial salience have been based on experimental studies manipulated to determine whether, given a certain stimulus, individuals would interpret an event as racially salient or ambiguous based on their stable beliefs about race. No substantial data existed along the lines of naturalistic inquiry to give the contextual evidence needed to comprehensively illuminate racial

salience as outlined by the MMRI. Findings from this study revealed that the particular environment in which one interacts with both outsider and ingroup members creates patterns of predictability regarding how an individual will respond to environmental stimuli. Particular campus events during which race was highlighted or students as African Americans were distinguished as the token or representative produced high racially salient situations. Other scenarios encompassing stimuli such as university traditions or reference group connections such as Greek membership created racially ambiguous situations dependent on an individual's acceptance of institutional culture. Findings emphasized that racial identity cannot be generalized for African American students across institutional types but must be studied according to distinctive institutional culture.

Distinctiveness theory is utilized to describe individuals' response to a complex stimulus, based on the extent to which that feature is distinctive from other features in that particular situation (Sellers et al., 1998). Because students identified more with personal black identity than black reference group orientation, there were greater implications when students were placed in a group of black individuals than when they were distinguished alone within a white space. For example, Bruce emphasized that when he was the only black individual he thrived in using his excellence to break stereotypes. But in instances such as sitting with two or three other black students in class, their inappropriate outbursts or horseplay instantly made race salient due to the fact that he could be typecast with their negative behavior. This variant understanding of racial salience indicates that assumptions of automatic belonging as well as

stigmatization cannot be made for all African American students. Individual beliefs on race guide situational behavior.

Unity culture confirmed the dominance of whiteness and the preference of the general student body that students conform to traditions in order to gain acceptance. My awareness of racial silencing made participant confidentiality and anonymity all the more essential to the study. Students in choosing their preferred location for interviews often chose hangouts such as the student union, library, and local coffee houses. Even within those locations I was constantly alert of our surroundings, being that such racially charged subjects were being discussed in public with student leaders who might easily be recognized. This especially held weight for Dennis as he held one of the most coveted student leader positions at Unity. For our first interview he profusely apologized for his tardiness, because he was constantly stopped walking across campus as recognized in his uniform. I therefore made the methodological decision to strictly meet with him in a pre-arranged private space. As Traditions Holder, he was expected to uphold the university in every aspect of his actions. Students as leaders in traditional positions regardless of race are generally placed in the role of university representative. However, the stripping of cultural values and voice has much greater implications of racial cognizance for black students in comparison to their white counterparts; for the latter, their actions are not deemed as a representation of their collective group.

### **Implications for Future MMRI Studies**

This comprehensive qualitative study with the MMRI as its framework lends itself to future research related to the validity of the MIBI to operationalize the concept

of multidimensional racial identity. At the inception of the MMRI a variety of assessments were utilized; for example the MIBI has been compared with previously validated scales such as the African Self-Conscious Scale and Racial Identity Attitude Scale to determine intercorrelations (Cokley & Helm, 2001; Sellers et al., 1998). These correlations were problematized due of the fact that authors of the MMRI do not assign value to one racial attitude or philosophy over the others. In regard to internal consistency, a determination on whether several items that propose to measure the same general construct produce similar scores, statistical data determined acceptable reliability coefficients for predictive and construct validation of the MIBI subscales.

As these analyses were run in the early stages of MMRI development, the latest study of MIBI validity was completed by Vandiver et al. (2009). In addition to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to validate MMRI subscales, they also suggested the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as this procedure allows researchers to impose a model on a particular data set to see how well the model explains the data. Findings revealed variance between the MIBI and design of the MMRI, and the authors found a five-factor solution through the intermingling of several construct items:

- Factor One: Centrality (centrality, nationalist, and private regard items)
- Factor Two: Public Regard (public regard and oppressed minority items)
- Factor Three: Oppressed Minority (oppressed minority and humanist items)
- Factor Four: Integrationist (nationalist, humanist, and assimilationist items)
- Factor Five: Assimilation (nationalist, centrality, oppressed minority, private regard, assimilationist, and humanist items)

While the current study was not intended to validate the MIBI subscales, qualitative data capturing the links between MMRI dimensions may be used in future research along with the statistical data of the above studies to better inform the survey constructs. My data analysis showed a strong relationship between all of the items combined in factor one: centrality, the nationalist subscale, and private regard. This suggests that the concept of race as significant as part of an individual's core identity is synonymous to some of the items designed to show an inclination toward black values and pride in black group membership. Vandiver et al. (2009) state that over half of the 56 MIBI items appear to measure more than one construct and suggest that the scale be revised to better operationalize the MMRI constructs. While several EFA and CFA studies exist exploring the content validity of the survey, this current study stands as the only comprehensive qualitative analysis of MIBI items and contributes significant in-depth responses for future revisions and operationalization of the MMRI. Qualitative methodology was significant for this study in capturing students' racial realities, and this qualitative approach can also aid in better informing existing quantitative data as well.

### **Conclusion**

Cokley (1999) uses the term racial awareness to describe the extent to which individuals appreciate and are cognizant of their racial and cultural heritage. The participants in my study expressed through this multifaceted process of inquiry just how they came to their own levels of racial awareness within their surroundings. Because racial identity studies are conducted mainly through quantitative methods, this study contributed to racial identity research in that it shifted the dominant approach to provide

further insight on the current racial realities for African American students through their own experiential knowledge. Rather than limiting the scientific study of racial identity through survey responses, racial identity was explored through open ended critical discourse, allowing for new understandings. Through use of the MMRI as a theoretical framework, a qualitative approach allowed for true reflexivity as students provided full considerations of how the PWI environment influenced and interacted with their racial cognizance.

The study's methodology gave participants the voice to challenge diversity rhetoric and institutional practices which perpetuated inequalities, and they also pushed themselves to use their involvement to move their self-awareness into action. Bruce in his final words of reflection verbalized that he wished to leave the message to other black students, "Live your life by design, not by default." The current study stood as an authentication of the need to move past generalization studies which place students within a particular frame by default of survey responses. Instead, by taking the study of multidimensional racial identity out of the dominant frame of research, we create a new design.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, W. R. (1998). And who shall control their minds?: Race consciousness and collective commitments among African American students. In Freeman, K. (Ed.), *African American culture and heritage in higher education research and practice*, (pp.93-119). Westport: Praeger.
- Aud, S., Fox, M., & KewalRamani, A. (2010). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups* (NCES 2010-015). Retrieved on June 21, 2011, from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015.pdf>.
- Asante, M. (2003). *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.
- Baber, L. D. (2012). A qualitative inquiry on the multidimensional racial development among first-year African American students attending a predominately white institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 81, 67-81.
- Baldwin, J. A. (1981). Notes on an Africentric theory of black personality. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 5, 172-179.
- Bernal, M. (1993). Black Athena: Hostilities to Egypt in the eighteenth century. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 47-63). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Knopp Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theories and methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America* (4th ed.). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonilla-Silva, E., & Baiocchi, G. (2008). Anything but racism: How sociologists limit the significance of race. In Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 137-151). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonilla-Silva, E., & Zuberi, T. (2008). Toward a definition of white logic and white methods. In Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 3-27). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bowleg, L. (2008). When black + lesbian + woman ≠ black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. *Sex Roles*, 59, 312-325.
- Brubacher, J. S., & Rudy, W. (1997). *Higher education in transition: A history of American colleges and universities* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Burawoy, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, 16, 4-33.
- Celious, A., & Oyserman, D. (2001). Race from the inside: An emerging heterogeneous race model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 149-165.
- Chang, M. J., Eagan, M. K., Lin, M. H., & Hurtado, S. (2009). *Stereotype threat: Undermining the persistence of racial minority freshmen in the sciences*. Paper presented at the 1009 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego.

- Chavous, T. (2000). The relationships among racial identity, perceived ethnic fit, and organizational involvement for African-American students at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Black Psychology, 26*, 79-100.
- Chavous, T. (2005). An intergroup contact-theory framework for evaluating racial climate on predominantly white college campuses. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 36*, 239-257.
- Cokley, K. O. (1999). Reconceptualizing the impact of college racial composition on African American students' racial identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 40*, 235-245.
- Cokley, K. O., & Helm, K. (2001). Testing the construct validity of scores in the multidimensional inventory of black identity. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 34*, 80-95.
- Cole, W. M. (2006). Accrediting culture: An analysis of tribal and historically black college curricula. *Sociology of Education, 79*, 355-388.
- Coon, H. M., & Kimmelmeier, M. (2001). Cultural orientations in the United States: (Re)examining differences among ethnic groups. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32*, 348-364.
- Cross, W. E. (1991). *Shades of black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Cross, W. E., & Fhagen-Smith, P. (1996). Nigrescence and ego identity development: Accounting for differential black identity patterns. *Counseling Across Cultures, 108-123*.

- Delgado-Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1997). *The souls of black folk*. Boston: Bedford Books. (Original work published in 1903)
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Essed, P., & Goldberg, D. T. (2002). *Race critical theories: Text and context*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Feagin, J. R. (2000). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2006) *Systemic Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2010) *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations*. New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The white racial frame*. New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R., Vera, H., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Fisher v. University of Texas. 133 S. Ct. 2411. (2013). Retrieved from LexisNexis Academic database.
- Fries-Britt, S., & Turner, B. (2002). Uneven stories: Successful black collegians at a

- black and a white campus. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25, 315-330.
- Garces, L. M. (2012). Racial diversity, legitimacy, and the citizenry: The impact of affirmative action bans on graduate school enrollment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 36, 93-132.
- Gergen, M. M., & Gergen, K. J. (2000). Qualitative inquiry: Tensions and transformations. In Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.), (pp. 1025-1046). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Goar, C. (2008). Experiments in black and white: Power and privilege in experimental methodology. In Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 153-162). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Goonatilake, S. (1993). Modern science and the periphery: The characteristics of dependent knowledge. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 259-267). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gould, S. J. (1993). American polygeny and craniometry before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as separate, inferior species. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 84-115). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gould, S. J. (1996). *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Gregory, S. T. (April, 2000). *Selected innovations in higher education designed to*

*enhance the racial climate for students in predominately white colleges and universities.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Grutter v. Bollinger. 539 U.S. 306. (2003). Retrieved from LexisNexis Academic database.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Gurin, P., Dey, E. L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 330-366.

Gusa, D. L. (2010). White institutional presence: The impact of whiteness on campus climate. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80, 464-489.

Harding, S. (1993). Eurocentric scientific illiteracy: A challenge for the world community. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 1-22). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Harper, S. R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *The Review of Higher Education*, 36, 9-29.

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. In S. R. Harper, & L. D. Patton (Eds.), *Responding to the realities of race on campus*. New Directions for Student Services (No. 120, pp. 7-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Harper, S. R., & Nichols, A. H. (2008). Are they not all the same?: Racial heterogeneity

- among black male undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49, 199-214.
- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for black identity expression and development among African-American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48, 127-144.
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York: Guildford Press.
- Helms, J. E. (1990). *Black and white identity: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pedersen, A., & Allen, W. (1999). Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education. *Review of Higher Education*, 21, 279-302.
- James, A. J. (2008). Making sense of race and racial classification. In Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 31-45). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design. In Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.), (pp. 379-399). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jones, L., Castellanos, J., & Cole, D. (2002). Examining the ethnic minority student experience at predominantly white institutions: A case study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 1, 19-39.
- Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of

- identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 405-414.
- Kambon, K. K. (1992). *The African personality in America: An African-centered framework*. Tallahassee: Nubian Nation Publications.
- Kaufman, P., & Feldman, K. A. (2004). Forming identities in college: A sociological approach. *Research in Higher Education*, 45, 463- 495.
- Kilgore, D. W. (2001). Critical and postmodern perspectives on adult learning. In S. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update of adult learning theory*. New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education, No. 89. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. New York: Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), (pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2013). *The constructivist credo*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Lopez, I. H. (2006). *White by law: The legal construction of race*. New York: New

York University Press.

Marcus, G. E., & Fischer, M. J. (1999). *Anthropology as cultural critique* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.).

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Marks, C. (2008). Methodologically Eliminating Race and Racism. In Zuberi, T., &

Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 47-62). Lanham:

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Markus, H., & Kunda, Z. (1986). Stability and malleability of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 858-866.

McEwen, M. K. (2005). The nature and uses of theory. In Wilson, M. E., & Wolf-

Wendel, L. (Eds.). *ASHE reader on college student development theory* (pp. 5-

24). Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.

McIntosh, P. (1993). Examining unearned privilege. *Liberal Education*, 79, 2p.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). *The case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Moore, W. L. (2008). *Reproducing racism: White space, elite law schools, and racial inequality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Moore, W. L., & Bell, J. M. (2011). Maneuvers of whiteness: 'Diversity' as a mechanism of retrenchment in the affirmative action discourse. *Critical Sociology*, 37, 597-613.

Morfin, O. J., Perez, V. H., Parker, L., Lynn, M., & Arrona, J. (2006). Hiding the

- politically obvious: A critical race theory preview of diversity as racial neutrality in higher education. *Educational Policy*, 20, 249-267.
- Museus, S. (2008). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly white institutions. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49, 568-586.
- Parham, T. A. (1989). Cycles of psychological nigrescence. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 17, 187-226.
- Parker, L. (1998). "Race is...race ain't": An explanation of the utility of critical race theory in qualitative research in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 42-55.
- Parker, M., & Flowers, A. (2003). The effects of racial identity on academic achievement and perceptions of campus connectedness on African-American students at predominately white institutions. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 22, 18-194.
- Patton, L. D., McEwen, M., Rendon, L., Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2007). Critical race perspectives on theory in student affairs. *New Directions for Student Services*, 120, 39-53.
- Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Penn, M. L., Gaines, S. O., & Phillips, L. (1993). On the desirability of own-group

- preference. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 19, 303-321.
- Peterson, M. W., Blackburn, R. T., Gamson, Z. F., Arce, C. H., Davenport, R. W., & Mingle, J. R. (1978). *Black students on white campuses: The impacts of increased black enrollments*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Peterson, M. W. & Spencer, M. (1990). Understanding academic culture and climate. In Tierney, W. G. (Ed.), *Assessing academic climates and cultures*, New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 68, pp. 3-18. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Phinney, J. S., & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54, 271–281.
- Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Rains, F.V. (1998). Is the benign really harmless?: Deconstructing some “benign” manifestations of operationalized white privilege. In J.L. Kincheloe, S.R. Steinberg, N.M. Rodriguez, & M.N. Chennault (Eds.) *White reign: Deploying whiteness in America*. New York: Palgrave.
- Renn, K. A. (2004). *Mixed race students in college: The ecology of race, identity, and community on campus*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Renn, K. A. (2004). Tilting at windmills: The paradox and promise of researching mixed race, with strategies for scholars. In Wallace, K. R. (Ed.). *Working with*

- multiracial students: Critical perspectives on research and practice*. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Renn, K. A. (2008). Research on biracial and multiracial identity development: Overview and synthesis. *New Directions for Student Services*, 123, 13-21.
- Robbins, R. H. (1997). *Cultural anthropology: A problem-based approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Illinois: Peacock Publishers.
- Rowley, S. J., Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Smith, M. A. (1998). The relationship between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college and high school students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 715-724.
- Sanders Thompson, V. L. (1995). The multidimensional structure of racial identification. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 29, 208-222.
- Sanders Thompson, V. L. (2001). The complexity of African American racial identification. *Journal of Black Studies*, 32, 155-165.
- Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist*, 45, 2, 109-119.
- Sellers, R. M. (1993). A call to arms for researchers studying racial identity. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 19, 327-332.
- Sellers, R. M., Rowley, S. A. J., Chavous, T. M., Shelton, J. N., & Smith, M. A. (1997). Multidimensional inventory of black identity: A preliminary investigation of reliability and construct validity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 805-815.
- Sellers, R. M., Shelton, J. N., Cooke, D. Y., Chavous, T. M., Rowley, S. A., & Smith,

- M. A. (1998). A multidimensional model of racial identity: Assumptions, findings, and future directions. *African American Identity Development*, 275-302.
- Sellers, R. M., Smith, M. A., Shelton, J. N., Rowley, S. A., & Chavous, T. M. (1998). Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2, 18-39.
- Shelton, J. N., & Sellers, R. M. (2000). Situational stability and variability in African American racial identity. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 26, 27-50.
- Sherif, M. (1968). The concept of reference groups in human relations. In Hyman, H. H., & Singer, E. (Eds), *Readings in reference group theory and research* (pp. 84-94). New York: The Free Press.
- Smith, E. M. (1989). Black racial identity development: Issues and concerns. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 17, 277-288.
- Smith, J. K. (1983). Quantitative versus qualitative research: An attempt to clarify the issue. *Educational Researcher*, 12(3), 6-13.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experience of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69, 60-73.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- St. John, E. P., Rowley, L. L., & Hu, S. (2009). Diversity and leadership: A study of high-achieving students of color. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78, 17-28.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Publications.

- Stanley, C. A. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominantly white colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*, 701-736.
- Stanley, C. A. (2010). When counter narratives meet master narratives in the journal. *Educational Researcher, 36*, 14-24.
- Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 797-811.
- Steinberg, S. (2007). *Race relations: A critique*. Stanford: Stanford Social Sciences.
- Stepan, N. L., & Gilman, S. L. (1993). Appropriating the idioms of science: The rejection of scientific racism. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 170-193). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Stewart, D. L. (2009). Perceptions of multiple identities among black college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*, 253-270.
- Stewart, D. L. (2010). Researcher as instrument: Understanding “shifting” findings in constructivist research. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 47*(3), 291-306.
- Stewart, Q. T. (2008). Theory and methodology in race research. In Zuberi, T., &

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 3-27). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Strange, C. (2005). Student development: The evolution of status of an essential idea. In Wilson, M. E., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (Eds.). *ASHE reader on college student development theory* (pp. 25-42). Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Sutton, M. E., & Kimbrough, W. M. (2001). Trends in black student involvement. *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal*, 39, 30-40.
- Tierney, W. G. (1988). Organizational culture: Defining the essentials. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59, 2-21.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *“Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?” and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.
- Tobolowsky, B., Outcalt, C., & McDonough, P. (2005). The role of HBCUs in the college choice process of African Americans in California. *Journal of Negro Education*, 74, 63-75.
- Taylor, C. & Howard- Hamilton M. (1995). Student involvement and racial identity attitudes among African- American males. *Journal of College Student Development*, 36,330-336.
- Third World Network. (1993). Modern science in crisis: A third world response. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *The racial economy of science: Toward a democratic future*, (pp. 484-518). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Vandiver, B. J., Worrell, F. C., & Delgado-Romero, E. A. (2009). A psychometric

- examination of multidimensional inventory of black identity (MIBI) scores. *Assessment*, 16, 337-350.
- Walters, P. B. (2001). Educational access and the state: Historical continuities and discontinuities in racial inequality in American education. *Sociology of Education*, 74, 35-49.
- Westbrook, L. (1994). Qualitative research methods: A review of major stages, data analysis techniques, and quality controls. (Direct correspondence) p. 241-254.
- White, J. L., & Parham, T. A. (1990). *The psychology of blacks: An African-American perspective* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- White, L. S. (1998). "Am I black enuf fo ya?" black student diversity: Issues of identity and community. In Freeman, K. (Ed.), *African American culture and heritage in higher education research and practice*, (pp.93-119). Westport: Praeger.
- Wijeyesinghe, C. L., & Jackson, B. W. (2001). *New perspectives on racial identity development*. New York: New York University Press.
- Zuberi, T. (2008). Deracializing social statistics: Problems in the quantification of race. In Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods*, (pp. 127-134). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

## APPENDIX A

### RACIAL CENTRALITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your background growing up (i.e., where you are from, what kind of schools you attended)
2. Growing up, did you have any particular incidents regarding being black that shaped how you identity now?
3. What influenced your decision to come to this institution?
4. Tell me about your experience during freshman year and how the adjustment to college was for you. What do you think about the racial makeup of the school?
5. Tell me the top 5 descriptors you might use to describe yourself, in order of importance (i.e., woman, student, mother, African American)
6. How do you feel about filling out forms about your racial identity? (show student the MIBI survey) How effective do you think surveys are in understanding how you feel about your race?

We are looking at racial identity which has been normally measured by surveys. Today I want to use some of survey items that focus on how important race and being black is to your identity. I will give you a survey item, and I would like you to describe how you feel about each statement. When discussing each item, please also include your experiences here in college in the groups you belong to as well as previous experiences that have shaped who you are.

7. Overall, being black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.

8. In general, being black is an important part of my self-image.
9. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other black people.
10. Being black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
11. I have a strong sense of belonging to black people.
12. I have a strong attachment to other black people.
13. Being black is an important reflection of who I am.
14. Being black is not a major factor in my social relationships.
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **RACIAL IDEOLOGY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

#### **(ASSIMILATIONIST/HUMANIST)**

1. Tell me about the student organizations that you belong to. What were the major reasons why you chose to participate in these organizations?
2. What are some reasons why black students would choose to participate in traditional student organizations such as SGA? What are some reasons why black students would choose to participate in culturally-based organizations such as black fraternities and sororities? What are some of the benefits and drawbacks to each type of organization?

We are looking at racial identity which has been normally measured by surveys. Today I want to use some of survey items that focus on how you feel blacks should live in society and interact with others. I will give you a survey item, and I would like you to describe how you feel about each statement. When discussing each item, please think about your experiences in your student organizations as well as the ways you interact with people in the larger society.

#### **(Assimilation Subscale)**

3. Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as white people who also espouse separatism.
4. A sign of progress is that blacks are in the mainstream of America more than ever before.

5. Because America is predominantly white, it is important that blacks go to white schools so that they can gain experience interacting with whites.
6. Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.
7. Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.
8. Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.
9. Blacks should feel free to interact socially with white people.
10. Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.
11. The plight of blacks in America will improve only when blacks are in important positions within the system.

**(Humanist Subscale)**

12. Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.
13. Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.
14. Blacks and whites have more commonalties than differences.
15. Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.
16. Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on black issues.
17. Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as black.
18. We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races.
19. Blacks should judge whites as individuals and not as members of the white race

20. People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.

21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **RACIAL IDEOLOGY PROTOCOL**

#### **(OPPRESSED MINORITY/NATIONALIST)**

1. What are the main differences, if any, that you see in the way that different organizations function on this campus and how they are recognized by the institution?
2. How would you describe the interaction of various racial groups with each other on this campus?
3. Describe your view on how black students interact and connect with each other at this institution.

We are looking at racial identity which has been normally measured by surveys. Today I want to use some of survey items that focus on how you feel blacks should live in society and interact with others. I will give you a survey item, and I would like you to describe how you feel about each statement. When discussing each item, please think about your experiences in your student organizations as well as the ways you interact with people in the larger society.

#### **(Oppressed Minority Subscale)**

4. The same forces which have led to the oppression of blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.
5. The struggle for black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.

6. Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.
7. Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.
8. The racism blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.
9. There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to black Americans.
10. Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.
11. Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.
12. The dominant society devalues anything not white male oriented.

**(Nationalist Subscale)**

13. It is important for black people to surround their children with black art, music and literature.
14. Black people should not marry interracially.
15. Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.
16. Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by blacks.
17. Black people must organize themselves into a separate black political force.
18. Whenever possible, blacks should buy from other black businesses.
19. A thorough knowledge of black history is very important for blacks today.
20. Blacks and whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.
21. White people can never be trusted where blacks are concerned.
22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **RACIAL REGARD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. Describe to me how you feel black students are viewed and treated on this campus by others.

We are looking at racial identity which has been normally measured by surveys. Today I want to use some of survey items that focus on how you feel about being black and how others in society view the black race in general. I will give you a survey item, and I would like you to describe how you feel about each statement. When discussing each item, please think about your experiences in your student organizations as well as the ways you interact with people in the larger society.

#### **(Private Regard Subscale)**

2. I feel good about black people.
3. I am happy that I am black.
4. I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.
5. I often regret that I am black.
6. I am proud to be black.
7. I feel that the black community has made valuable contributions to this society

#### **(Public Regard Subscale)**

8. Overall, blacks are considered good by others.
9. In general, others respect black people.

10. Most people consider blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.
11. Blacks are not respected by the broader society.
12. In general, other groups view blacks in a positive manner.
13. Society views black people as an asset.
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?